

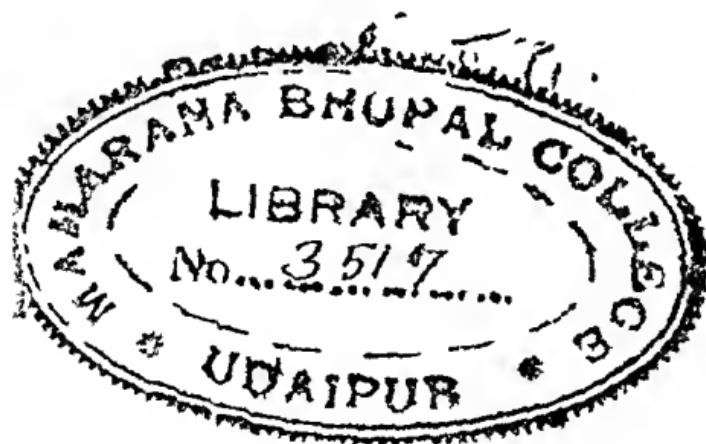
ESSAYS BY
WILLIAM HAZLITT

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

CHARLES WHIBLEY

AND

NOTES BY THOMAS BAYNE



BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
WARWICK HOUSE, BOMBAY
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Introduction

It is a common opinion that death puts an end to the jealousy and malice of life, that a writer, whose peevishness has alienated his friends, receives a sure, if tardy, justice at the hands of succeeding generations. The fate of William Hazlitt proves upon how insecure a basis this opinion rests. He has been dead for more than seventy years, and he has not yet come into his proper heritage of fame. The old controversies cling about him. He is not yet free from the reproach of ingratitude. He still repels those who suffered no injury at his hands, and who should long since have forgotten his offences in humble thankfulness of heart. To understand his faults is to condone them. A little knowledge, by softening his asperities, should permit us to contemplate his admirable writings without an unreasoning prejudice. What was it, then, which persuaded Hazlitt to quarrel with his friends, and to perplex his readers? Sensitive and irritable, he gave the impression of one who had suffered and resented an affront. De Quincey declares that "he

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hated with all his heart every institution, and all his pretensions. He loathed his own relation to the human race." Exaggerated as this statement is, it is an exaggeration of truth. Hazlitt's hatred and ferocity were real, although they were caused by nothing more poisonous than a theory of life and politics. In blood and sympathy he was a political dissenter, who believed that the French Revolution was the noblest event chronicled in history, and that all the opponents of its fury, including the majority of his own countrymen, were either knaves or fools. The narrow views which he formed in his youth were unalterable. He turned a pitilessly consistent eye upon the events of his time, and involved in a general crime of disloyalty all whose intelligence was more wisely adaptable than his own. There was a time when Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey cherished the same vague aspirations as comforted him to the end; and, because with changing circumstances they changed their opinions, he despised them as traitors to an honourable cause. He could not bear to think that his friend should advance beyond the line of thought fixed by himself. And his bravery in supporting the unpopular side was absolute, like his consistency. "Mental courage", said he, "is the only courage I pretend to. I dare

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"venture an opinion where few else would, and particularly if I think it right. I have retracted few of my positions. Whether this arises from obstinacy or strength, or indifference to the opinions of others, I know not. In little else I have the spirit of martyrdom: but I would give up anything rather than an abstract proposition." Thus he wrote with a rare knowledge of self. He would rather change a friend than an opinion, and, as he could not endure those who were not on his side, he sacrificed to a mistaken principle, Coleridge, and Wordsworth, and Lamb. And the effect of his obstinacy was heightened by a fearless candour. He must purge his spirit of what seemed to him the truth. In his *Life of Napoleon* he confessed his contempt of all governments, especially of his own, and made a boast of the political wrath that was consuming him. So too when he fell in love with Sarah Walker, he was not content to babble of her to his friends; he did not gain peace until he had given literary expression to his madness.

But, for all his love of abstract propositions, Hazlitt was a man of letters, not a philosopher nor a politician; and his love of abstract propositions did not disturb his literary judgment. Though he may have been ill to live with, though he may be placed, where he placed

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Guy Fawkes, in the ranks of the good haters, he had but to sit down to his desk to forget the rage and anger of his heart. Truly no man ever had a clearer vocation. He was born with a pen in his hand. The theology and philosophy which engrossed his youth held but partial sway in his intellect. The art of painting, to which he might have dedicated himself, yielded to the imperious claim of letters, and the narrow space which controversy fills in his published works is the best proof of his single-minded devotion. If he had ever wavered, his meeting with Coleridge would have sealed him of the band. To Coleridge he owed his voice and inspiration. The poet's visit to Shrewsbury changed for Hazlitt the whole world of thought and sensation. "As we passed along between Wem and Shrewsbury," says he in the essay called "My First Acquaintance with Poets", "and I eyed the blue tops of the Welsh mountains seen through the wintry branches, or the red rustling leaves of the sturdy oak-trees by the roadside, a sound was in my ears as of a Syren's song; I was stunned, startled with it, as from deep sleep; but I had no notion then that I should ever be able to express my admiration to others in motley imagery or quaint allusion, till the light of his genius shone into my soul, like

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the sun's rays glittering in the puddles of the road. I was at that time dumb, inarticulate, helpless, like a worm by the wayside, crushed, bleeding, lifeless ; but now, bursting the deadly bands that bound them,

With Styx nine times round them',

my ideas float on winged words, and as they expand their plumes, catch the golden light of other years."

In Coleridge's presence poetry and philosophy had met together. The bard had "talked far above singing", and Hazlitt had discovered himself a man of letters. Henceforth books were his profession. He read with the taste of the connoisseur, and he wrote with the fury of an enthusiast. But he was never a bookworm. He did not read for the sake of reading ; he was superior to the vanity which delights in the knowledge of whatever is strange or rare. A man of few books and oft-repeated quotations, he made the best of what he knew, and there was nothing he disliked more than the coxcombry of those who are always running after the newest volume which lies on the bookseller's counter. Shakespeare and Milton, Fielding and Sir Thomas Browne, the classics of every age were sufficient for his purpose ; and among the moderns there was but one—the author

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of *Waverley*—whom he admitted into the august company of his friends. He tasted literature as an amateur tastes wines, and the quality of “gusto”, which he prized most highly in poet or fives-player, in actor or statesman, was never absent from his own writings. His style is always copious and fanciful. He is as apt in illustration as he is rapid in eloquence. When he praises, he praises with a clear voice and a full heart, and he writes with equal zest and pleasure of all the arts. Claude and Kean, Bill Neate and Cavanagh, were equal heroes in his eyes. Above all he showed his skill in illustrating one craft from another. It is thus, for instance, that he summed up Cavanagh’s mastery in the fives’ court: “his blows were not undecided and ineffectual, lumbering like Mr. Wordsworth’s epic poetry, nor wavering like Mr. Coleridge’s lyric prose, nor short of the mark like Mr. Brougham’s speeches, nor wide of it like Mr. Canning’s wit, nor foul like the *Quarterly*, nor let balls like the *Edinburgh Review*. Cobbett and Junius together would have made a Cavanagh.” Of the stage he wrote with a justice and a clarity which have never been surpassed. He is one of the few dramatic critics who have been able to explain in words the style and manner of the great

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actors. The grandeur of Kean still lives in the prose of Hazlitt, and it is fortunate for us that the golden age of the theatre was the golden age also of criticism.

But it was to literature that he paid the most willing homage. And in all matters of literature he was a stern, unbending Tory. He had as keen an aversion to new schools as he had to new books. He was always ready to defend the past against the present, to exalt whatever was noble and aristocratic. When he heard men speaking of Burke and Johnson he declared that "genius and fame had flung a spell into the air". A Jacobin in polities, he was in letters the fiercest of anti-Jacobins. "The spirit of Jacobinism", he said, "is essentially at variance with the spirit of poetry", and when Wordsworth made heroes of ploughmen and pedlars he charged the poet with disloyalty to his craft. "The spirit of Jacobin poetry is rank egotism. We know an instance. It is of a person who founded a school of poetry on sheer humanity, on idiot boys and mad mothers, and on Simon Lee, the old huntsman . . . This person admires nothing that is admirable, feels no interest in anything interesting, no grandeur in anything grand, no beauty in anything beautiful. He tolerates nothing but what he himself creates;

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he sympathizes only with what can enter into no competition with him, with the bare earth and mountains bare, and grass in the green field." The prejudice of this criticism is evident, but it is a sincere expression of Hazlitt's love for the grandiose and classical. Though he believed the people supreme in politics, he would have had it content with that supremacy, and sternly repulsed its futile attack upon the arts. And that is the paradox of Hazlitt's career: himself a violent and irreconcilable Radical, he rigidly excluded the spirit of Radicalism from what he best loved and best understood.

Like the true man of letters that he was, he knew the limitations of his craft. "A mere scholar," he said, "who knows nothing but books, must be ignorant even of them. Books do not teach the use of books. How should he know anything of a work, who knows nothing of the subject of it?" And Hazlitt, that he might appreciate the books that were his companions, went out into the world of sensation and experience. The tavern and the road revealed to him all their secrets. He loved whatever was free and open, and despised with equal warmth the pomp and pedantry of officialism. "More home truths", said he, "are to be learnt from a noisy debate in an ale-house, than from attending to a formal one

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in the House of Commons." And that which he loved and knew he described with a sense of romance, with an eager picture-queness, which make a sharp and vivid impression. If the prize-ring survive in literature it will be due to Hazlitt, whose description of the fight between Bill Neate and the Gasman is the masterpiece of its kind. Thus would Pierce Egan, the celebrated author of *Boxiana*, have written, had he been gifted with sensibility and a style. From the very moment that Hazlitt goes to Jack Randall's to ask where the fight is to be, he carries you with him. In fancy you mount the Bath Mail at the White Horse Cellar, and drive through the drizzling mist. You listen to the gossip of Tom Turtle, the trainer; you applaud the style of the tall English yeoman, for whom Hogarth, Shakespeare, and nature are just enough to know; and you see the conflict through Hazlitt's eyes as vividly as if you had been at the ring yourself. The fall of Hickman afflicts you like a sudden blow. "He hung suspended for a second or two, and then fell back, throwing his hands in the air, and with his face lifted up to the sky. . . . All traces of life, of natural expression, were gone from him. . . . He was not like a natural man, but like a preternatural spectral appearance, or like one of the figures in Dante's

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Inferno." Poetical justice had been done. Boastfulness had suffered a merited defeat, for, as Hazlitt said, "modesty should accompany the *Fancy* as its shadow". But, in spite of his vanity, the Gasman was a gallant fellow, and Hazlitt gave him the immortality which he deserved.

In brief, if man be the proper subject of books, then Hazlitt perfectly understood the use of a library. No man ever had a keener eye for the eccentricities of human character. He has sketched the Londoners of his time with a humour and perception which need not fear comparison with Dickens. His Coffee House politicians are men of real blood and bone, alive and alert in spite of their folly. Admirable is his sketch of Mr. Pinch, the Cockney fives-player, whose romance never wandered from behind his counter, whose patriotism lay in his breeches pocket, and who on all occasions and to all comers had but one answer: "The same to you, Sir". These are drawn with a humour, an invention, a sense of life, which give Hazlitt an easy right to claim the supreme gift of imagination.

But the men whom Hazlitt drew were not always thus insignificant. He has left us as good portraits of Lamb and Coleridge as exist. When we read his pages, it is as though we surprised the heroes at their fireside. We

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listen to the echo of voices silenced a century ago. "Coleridge talked well on every subject," we are willing to believe, "and Godwin on none." But it is in lively similes that Hazlitt excels, and he has left a memory of his friends which is ineffaceable. "Mrs. Montague's conversation", he tells us, "is as fine cut as her features, and I like to sit in the room with that sort of coronet face. What she says leaves a flavour, like fine green tea. Hunt's is like champagne, and Northcote's like anchovy sandwiches. Haydon's is like a game of trap-ball; Lamb's like snap-dragon; and my own is not very much unlike a game of nine-pins." The names of talkers, like the names of actors, are writ in water. Yet if one art may represent another, the essay "Of Persons One would Wish to have Seen" admits us into the very presence of the dead.

Thus Hazlitt wrote, and read, and quarrelled, haunted the theatre and the fives-court, and got from life the best that life had to give. And it is his works that present the most amiable portrait of the man, for in them we may see the zest and enthusiasm, which never left him; there we may note his love of all that was finest in the arts which he appreciated; and in his quick style, and happy allusiveness, we may forget that John Lamb was ever driven

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by temper to knock him down, or that he spoke of Coleridge and Wordsworth with a contempt which an ancient friendship did not warrant. The best and dearest of his friends, knowing all, forgave all. "Protesting against much that he has written," said Lamb, after many years of friendship and estrangement, "and some things which he chooses to do, judging him by his conversations, which I enjoyed so long and relished so deeply, or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes, I should belie my own conscience if I said less than that I think W. H. to be in his natural and healthy state one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy that was between us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire; and I think I shall find, such another companion." It was worth living to win such a tribute, and Hazlitt himself, difficult though he was in friendship, died without regret or remorse. "Well, I have had a happy life,"—these were his last words; and they are the clearest answer to those who see in him nothing better than a morose, ill-natured enemy of his kind.

CHARLES WHIBLEY.

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Iago

Mr. Kean plays Iago with admirable facility and effect. It is the most faultless of his performances, the most consistent and entire. Perhaps the accomplished hypocrite was never so finely, so adroitly portrayed—a gay, light-hearted monster, a careless, cordial, comfortable villain. The preservation of character was so complete, the air and manner were so much of a piece throughout, that the part seemed more like a detached scene or single *trait*, and of shorter duration than it usually does. The ease, familiarity, and tone of nature with which the text was delivered were quite equal to anything we have seen in the best comic acting. It was the least overdone of all his parts, though full of point, spirit, and brilliancy. The odiousness of the character was, in fact, in some measure, glossed over by the extreme grace, alacrity, and rapidity of the execution. Whether this effect were “a consummation of the art devoutly to be wished”, is another question, on which we entertain some doubts. We have already stated it as our opinion that Mr. Kean is not a literal transcriber of his author’s text; he translates his characters with great freedom and ingenuity

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into a language of his own ; but at the same time we cannot help preferring his liberal and spirited dramatic versions to the dull, literal, commonplace monotony of his competitors. Besides, after all, in the conception of the part, he may be right and we may be wrong. We have before complained that Mr. Kean's Richard was not gay enough, and we should now be disposed to complain that his Iago is not grave enough.

We certainly think his performance of this part one of the most extraordinary exhibitions on the stage. There is no one within our remembrance who has so completely foiled the critics as this celebrated actor : one sagacious person imagines that he must perform a part in a certain manner ; another virtuoso chalks out a different path for him ; and when the time comes, he does the whole off in a way that neither of them had the least conception of, and which both of them are therefore very ready to condemn as entirely wrong. It was ever the trick of genius to be thus. We confess that Mr. Kean has thrown us out more than once. For instance, we are very much inclined to persist in the objection we before made, that his Richard is not gay enough, and that his Iago is not grave enough. This he may perhaps conceive to be the mere caprice of captious criticism ; but we will try to give our reasons, and shall leave them to Mr. Kean's better judgment.

It is to be remembered, then, that Richard was a princely villain, borne along in a sort of

triumphal car of royal state, buoyed up with the hopes and privileges of his birth, reposing even on the sanctity of religion, trampling on his devoted victims without remorse, and who looked out and laughed from the high watch-tower of his confidence and his expectations, on the desolation and misery he had caused around him. He held on his way, unquestioned, "hedged in with the divinity of kings", amenable to no tribunal, and abusing his power *in contempt of mankind*. But as for Iago, we conceive differently of him. He had not the same natural advantages. He was a mere adventurer in mischief, a painstaking, plodding knave, without patent or pedigree, who was obliged to work his uphill way by wit, not by will, and to be the founder of his own fortune. He was, if we may be allowed a vulgar allusion, a true prototype of modern Jacobinism, who thought that talents ought to decide the place; a man of "morbid sensibility" (in the fashionable phrase), full of distrust, of hatred, of anxious and corroding thoughts, and who, though he might assume a temporary superiority over others by superior adroitness, and pride himself in his skill, could not be supposed to assume it as a matter of course, as if he had been entitled to it from his birth.

We do not here mean to enter into the characters of the two men, but something must be allowed to the difference of their situations. There might be the same indifference in both as to the end in view, but there could not well

be the same security as to the success of the means. Iago had to pass through a different ordeal: he had no appliances and means to boot; no royal road to the completion of his tragedy. His pretensions were not backed by authority; they were not baptized at the font; they were not holy-water proof. He had the whole to answer for in his own person, and could not shift the responsibility to the heads of others. Mr. Kean's Richard was therefore, we think, deficient in something of that regal jollity and reeling triumph of success which the part would bear; but this we can easily account for, because it is the traditional commonplace idea of the character, that he is to "play the dog—to bite and snarl".—The extreme unconcern and laboured levity of his Iago, on the contrary, is a refinement and original device of the actor's own mind, and deserves a distinct consideration. The character of Iago, in fact, belongs to a class of characters common to Shakespeare, and at the same time peculiar to him, namely, that of great intellectual activity, accompanied with a total want of moral principle, and therefore displaying itself at the constant expense of others, making use of reason as a pander to will—employing its ingenuity and its resources to palliate its own crimes, and aggravate the faults of others, and seeking to confound the practical distinctions of right and wrong, by referring them to some overstrained standard of speculative refinement.

"Some persons, more nice than wise, have

thought the whole of the character of Iago unnatural. Shakespeare, who was quite as good a philosopher as he was a poet, thought otherwise. He knew that the love of power, which is another name for the love of mischief, was natural to man. He would know this as well or better than if it had been demonstrated to him by a logical diagram, merely from seeing children paddle in the dirt, or kill flies for sport. We might ask those who think the character of Iago not natural, why they go to see it performed—but from the interest it excites, the sharper edge which it sets on their curiosity and imagination? Why do we go to see tragedies in general? Why do we always read the accounts in the newspapers of dreadful fires and shocking murders, but for the same reason? Why do so many persons frequent executions and trials; or why do the lower classes almost universally take delight in barbarous sports and cruelty to animals, but because there is a natural tendency in the mind to strong excitement, a desire to have its faculties roused and stimulated to the utmost? Whenever this principle is not under the restraint of humanity or the sense of moral obligation, there are no excesses to which it will not of itself give rise, without the assistance of any other motive, either of passion or self-interest. Iago is only an extreme instance of the kind; that is, of diseased intellectual activity, with an almost perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or rather with a preference of the latter, because it falls more in with his

favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts, and scope to his actions. Be it observed, too (for the sake of those who are for squaring all human actions by the maxims of *Rochefoucault*), that he is quite or nearly as indifferent to his own fate as to that of others; that he runs all risks for a trifling and doubtful advantage; and is himself the dupe and victim of his ruling passion—an incorrigible love of mischief—an insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous kind. Now this, though it be sport, yet it is dreadful sport. There is no room for trifling and indifference, nor scarcely for the appearance of it; the very object of his whole plot is to keep his faculties stretched on the rack, in a state of watch and ward, in a sort of breathless suspense, without a moment's interval of repose. He has a desperate stake to play for, like a man who fences with poisoned weapons, and has business enough on his hands to call for the whole stock of his sober circumspection, his dark duplicity and insidious gravity. He resembles a man who sits down to play at chess, for the sake of the difficulty and complication of the game, and who immediately becomes absorbed in it. His amusements, if they are amusements, are severe and saturnine—his very wit blisters. Even if other circumstances permitted it, the part he has to play with *Othello* requires that he should assume the most serious concern, and something of the plausibility of a confessor. “His cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh

like "Tom o' Bedlam." He is repeatedly called "honest Iago", which looks as if there were something suspicious in his appearance, which admitted a different construction. The tone which he adopts in the scenes with Roderigo, Desdemona, and Cassio is only a relaxation from the more arduous business of the play. Yet there is in all his conversation an inveterate misanthropy, a licentious keenness of perception, which is always sagacious of evil, and sniffs up the tainted scent of its quarry with rancorous delight. An exuberance of spleen is the essence of the character. The view which we have here taken of the subject (if at all correct) will not, therefore, justify the extreme alteration which Mr. Kean has introduced into the part.

Actors in general have been struck only with the wickedness of the character, and have exhibited an assassin going to the place of execution. Mr. Kean has abstracted the wit of the character, and makes Iago appear throughout an excellent good fellow, and lively bottle-companion. But though we do not wish him to be represented as a monster or a fiend, we see no reason why he should instantly be converted into a pattern of comic gaiety and good humour. The light which illuminates the character should rather resemble the flashes of lightning in the murky sky, which make the darkness more terrible. Mr. Kean's Iago is, we suspect, too much in the sun. His manner of acting the part would have suited better with the character of Edmund

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in King Lear, who, though in other respects much the same, has a spice of gallantry in his constitution, and has the favour and countenance of the ladies, which always gives a man the smug appearance of a bridegroom!

The general groundwork of the character of Iago, as it appears to us, is not absolute malignity, but a want of moral principle, or an indifference to the real consequences of the actions, which the meddling perversity of his disposition and love of immediate excitement lead him to commit. He is an amateur of tragedy in real life; and instead of exercising his ingenuity on imaginary characters, or forgotten incidents, he takes the bolder and more desperate course of getting up his plot at home, casts the principal parts among his nearest friends and connections, and rehearses it in downright earnest, with steady nerves and unabated resolution. The character is a complete abstraction of the intellectual from the moral being; or, in other words, consists in an absorption of every common feeling in the virulence of his understanding, the deliberate wilfulness of his purposes, and in his restless, untameable love of mischievous contrivance. We proceed to quote some particular passages in support of this opinion.

In the general dialogue and reflections, which are an accompaniment to the progress of the catastrophe, there is a constant overflowing of gall and bitterness. The acuteness of his malice fastens upon everything alike, and pursues the most distant analogies of evil with

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a provoking sagacity. He by no means forms an exception to his own rule:—

“Who has that breast so pure,
But some uncleanly apprehension?
Keep leets and law dry, and in sessions sit
With mediations lawful?”

His mirth is not natural and cheerful, but forced and extravagant, partaking of the intense activity of mind and cynical contempt of others in which it originate. Iago is not, like Candide, a believer in optimism, but seems to have a thorough hatred or distrust of everything of the kind, and to dwell with gloating satisfaction on whatever can interrupt the enjoyment of others, and gratify his moody irritability. One of his most characteristic speeches is that immediately after the marriage of Othello:—

“Roderigo What a full fortune does the thick-lips owe,
If he can carry her thus?
Iago Call up her father
Rouse him [Othello], make after him, poison his delight,
Proclaim him in the streets, incense her kinsmen,
And tho’ he in a fertile climate dwell,
Plague him with flies: tho’ that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on’t,
As it may lose some colour”

The pertinacious logical following up of his favourite principle in this passage, is admirable. In the next, his imagination runs riot in the

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mischief he is plotting, and breaks out into the wildness and impetuosity of real enthusiasm:—

“*Roderigo*. Here is her father’s house, I’ll call aloud.

Iago. Do, with like timorous accent and dire yell,
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities.”

There is nothing here of the trim levity and epigrammatic conciseness of Mr. Kean’s manner of acting the part; which is no less paradoxical than Mrs. Greville’s celebrated Ode to Indifference. *Iago* was a man of genius, and not a *petit maître*. One of his most frequent topics, on which he is rich indeed, and in descanting on which his spleen serves him for a muse, is the disproportionate match between Desdemona and the Moor. This is brought forward in the first scene, and is never lost sight of afterwards.

“*Brabantio*. What is the reason of this terrible summons?

Iago. Sir, you’re robb’d; for shame, put on your gown;

Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul:
Arise, arise,

Awake the snoring citizens with the bell,
Or else the devil will make a grandire of you.

Arise, I say.”—[*And is on to the end of the passage*]

Now all this goes on sptings well oiled: Mr. Kean’s mode of giving the passage had the tightness of a drum-head, and was muffled (perhaps purposely so) into the bargain.

LAGO

This is a clue to the character of the lady which Iago is not at all ready to part with. He recurs to it again in the second act, when, in answer to his insinuations against Desdemona, Roderigo says,—

“I cannot believe that in her—she’s full of most bless’d conditions.

Iago. Bless’d fig’s end. The wine she drinks is made of grapes. If she had been bless’d, she would never have loved the Moor.”

And again, with still more effect and spirit afterwards, when he takes advantage of this very suggestion arising in Othello’s own breast :—

“*Othello.* And yet how nature erring from itself—

Iago. Aye, there’s the point ;—as, to be bold with you,

Not to affect many proposed matches,
Of her own clime, complexion, and degree
Whereto we see in all things Nature tend. ;
Foul ! one may smell in such, a will most rank,
Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural.”

This is probing to the quick. “Our Ancient” here turns the character of poor Desdemona, as it were, inside out. It is certain that nothing but the genius of Shakespeare could have preserved the entire interest and delicacy of the part, and have even drawn an additional elegance and dignity from the peculiar circumstances in which she is placed. The character, indeed, has always had the greatest charm for minds of the finest sensibility.

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For our own part, we are a little of Iago's counsel in this matter; and, all circumstances considered, and platonics out of the question, if we were to cast the complexion of Desdemona physiognomically, we should say that she had a very fair skin, and very light auburn hair, inclining to yellow! We at the same time give her infinite credit for purity and delicacy of sentiment; but it so happens that purity and grossness sometimes

*"nearly are allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide".*

Yet the reverse does not hold; so uncertain and undefinable a thing is moral character! It is no wonder that Iago had some contempt for it, "who knew all qualities of human dealings, with a learned spirit". There is considerable gaiety and ease in his dialogue with Emilia and Desdemona on their landing. It is then holiday time with him; but yet the general satire will be acknowledged (at least by one-half of our readers) to be biting enough, and his idea of his own character is finely expressed in what he says to Desdemona, when she asks him how he would praise her—

*"Oh, gentle lady, do not put me to it,
For I am nothing, if not critical".*

Mr. Kean's execution of this part we thought admirable; but he was quite as much at his ease in every other part of the play, which was done (we know not why) in a single key.

AGO

The part in which, according to our conception, Mr. Kean failed most, was in the third act, with Othello, where "comes the tug of war". The following passage is, we think, decisive to our purpose:—

Iago. My noble lord.

Othello. What dost thou say, Iago?

Iago. Did Michael Cassio, when you woo'd my lady,

Know of your love?

Othello. He did from first to last: why dost thou ask?

Iago. But for a satisfaction of my thought; No further harm.

Othello. Why of thy thought, Iago?

Iago. I did not think he had been acquainted with her.

Othello. O yes, and went between us very oft—

Iago. Indeed?

Othello. Indeed! Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught in that?

Is he not honest?

Iago. Honest, my Lord?

Othello. Honest? Ay, honest.

Iago. My Lord, for aught I know.

Othello. What dost thou think?

Iago. Think, my Lord!

Othello. Think, my Lord! Alas, he echoes me, As if there were some monster in his thought Too hideous to be shewn. Thou dost mean something:

I heard thee say even now, thou lik'dst not that— When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like?

And when I told thee, he was of my counsel,

In my whole course of wooing; thou criedst, 'Indeed!'

And didst contract and purse thy brow together,

IAGO

As if thou then haist shut up in thy brain
Some horrible conceit : If thou dost love me,
Shew me thy thought.

Iago. My Lord, you know I love you.

Othello. I think thou dost :

And for I know thou 'rt full of love and honesty,
And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them
breath,

Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more :
For such things in a false disloyal knave
Are tricks of custom : but in a man that 's just,
They 're cold dilations working from the heart
That passion cannot rule."

Now, if there is anything of superficial gaiety or heedlessness in this, "it is not written in the bond":—the breaks and stops, the pursing and knitting of the brow together, the deep internal working of hypocrisy under the mask of love and honesty, escaped us on the stage.—The same observation applies to what he says afterwards of himself:—

" Though I perchance am vicious in my guess,
As I confess it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not ".

The candour of this confession would hardly be extorted from him, if it did not correspond with the moody dissatisfaction, and suspicious, creeping, cat-like watchfulness of his general appearance. The anxious suspense, the deep artifice, the collected earnestness, and, if we may so say, the *passion* of hypocrisy, are decidedly marked in every line of the whole scene, and

IAGO

are worked up to a sort of paroxysm afterwards, in that inimitably characteristic apostrophe:—

“O grace! O Heaven forgive me!
Are you a man? Have you a soul or sense?
God be wi’ you: take mine office. O, wretched
fool,
That liv’st to make thine honesty a vice!
Oh, monstrous world! Take note, take note, O
world!
To be direct and honest is not safe
I thank you for this profit, and from hence
I’ll love no friend, since love breeds such offence.”

This burst of hypocritical indignation might well have called forth all Mr. Kean’s powers, but it did not. We might multiply passages of the same kind, if we had time.

The philosophy of the character is strikingly unfolded in the part where Iago gets the handkerchief:—

“This may do something.
The Moor already changes with my poisons.
Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
But with a little act upon the blood,
Burn like the mines of sulphur.”

We here find him watching the success of his experiment, with the sanguine anticipation of an alchemist at the moment of projection:—

“I did say so:
Look where he comes.—[Enter Othello].—Not poppy
nor mandragora,

IAGO

Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday."

Again he says:—

"Work on,
My medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are
caught;
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
All guiltless, meet reproach."

So that, after all, he would persuade us that his object is only to give an instructive example of the injustice that prevails in the world.

If he is bad enough when he has business on his hands, he is still worse when his purposes are suspended, and he has only to reflect on the misery he has occasioned. His indifference when Othello falls in a trance, is perfectly diabolical, but perfectly in character:—

*"Iago. How is it, General? Have you not hurt
your head?"*

Othello. Dost thou mock me?

Iago. I mock you! no, by heaven," &c.

The callous levity which Mr. Kean seems to consider as belonging to the character in general is proper here, because Iago has no failings connected with humanity; but he has other feelings and other passions of his own, which are not to be trifled with.

We do not, however, approve of Mr. Kean's pointing to the dead bodies after the catastrophe. It is not in the character of the part,

IAGO

which consists in the love of mischief, not as an end, but as a means, and when that end is attained, though he may feel no remorse, he would feel no triumph. Besides, it is not the text of Shakespeare. Iago does not point to the bed, but Lodovico bids him look at it:—"Look on the tragic loading of this bed," &c.

ON GUSTO

sense, distinct from every other object, and having something divine in it, which the heart owns and the imagination consecrates, the objects in the picture preserve the same impression, absolute, unimpaired, stamped with all the truth of passion, the pride of the eye, and the charm of beauty. Rubens makes his flesh-colour like flowers; Albani's is like ivory; Titian's is like flesh, and like nothing else. It is as different from that of other painters as the skin is from a piece of white or red drapery thrown over it. The blood circulates here and there, the blue veins just appear, the rest is distinguished throughout only by that sort of tingling sensation to the eye which the body feels within itself. This is gusto.—Vandyke's flesh-colour, though it has great truth and purity, wants gusto. It has not the internal character, the living principle in it. It is a smooth surface, not a warm, moving mass. It is painted without passion, with indifference. The hand only has been concerned. The impression slides off from the eye, and does not, like the tones of Titian's pencil, leave a sting behind it in the mind of the spectator. The eye does not acquire a taste or appetite for what it sees. In a word, gusto in painting is where the impression made on one sense excites by affinity those of another.

Michael Angelo's forms are full of gusto. They everywhere obtrude the sense of power upon the eye. His limbs convey an idea of muscular strength, of moral grandeur, and even of intellectual dignity: they are firm, command-

ing, broid, and massy, capable of executing with ease the determined purposes of the will. His faces have no other expression than his figures, conscious power and capacity. They appear only to think what they shall do, and to know that they can do it. This is what is meant by saying that his style is hard and masculine. It is the reverse of Correggio's, which is effeminate. That is, the *gusto* of Michael Angelo consists in expressing energy of will without proportionable sensibility, Correggio's inexpressing exquisite sensibility without energy of will. In Correggio's faces as well as figures we see neither bones nor muscles, but then what a soul is there, full of sweetness and of grace—pure, playful, soft, angelical! There is sentiment enough in a hand painted by Correggio to set up a school of history painters. Whenever we look at the hands of Correggio's women or of Raphael's, we always wish to touch them.

Again, Titian's landscapes have a prodigious gusto, both in the colouring and forms. We shall never forget one that we saw many years ago in the Orleans Gallery, of Acteon hunting. It had a brown, mellow, autumnal look. The sky was of the colour of stone. The winds seemed to sing through the rustling branches of the trees, and already you might hear the twanging of bows resound through the tangled mazes of the wood. Mr. West, we understand, has this landscape. He will know if this description of it is just. The landscape background of the St. Peter Martyr is another well-

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known instance of the power of this great painter to give a romantic interest and an appropriate character to the objects of his pencil, where every circumstance adds to the effect of the scene,—the bold trunks of the tall forest trees, the trailing ground plants, with that cold convent spire rising in the distance, amidst the blue sapphire mountains and the golden sky.

Rubens has a great deal of gusto in his Fauns and Satyrs, and in all that expresses motion, but in nothing else. Rembrandt has it in everything; everything in his pictures has a tangible character. If he puts a diamond in the ear of a Burgomaster's wife, it is of the first water; and his furs and stuffs are proof against a Russian winter. Raphael's gusto was only in expression; he had no idea of the character of anything but the human form. The dryness and poverty of his style in other respects is a phenomenon in the art. His trees are like sprigs of grass stuck in a book of botanical specimens. Was it that Raphael never had time to go beyond the walls of Rome? That he was always in the streets, at church, or in the bath? He was not one of the Society of Arcadians.

Claude's landscapes, perfect as they are, want gusto. This is not easy to explain. They are perfect abstractions of the visible images of things; they speak the visible language of nature truly. They resemble a mirror or a microscope. To the eye only they are more perfect than any other landscapes that ever were or will be painted; they give more of nature, as cognizable by one sense alone; but they lay an

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equal stress on all visible impressions ; they do not interpret one sense by another ; they do not distinguish the character of different objects as we are taught, and can only be taught, to distinguish them by their effect on the different senses. That is, his eye wanted imagination : it did not strongly sympathize with his other faculties. He saw the atmosphere, but he did not feel it. He painted the trunk of a tree or a rock in the foreground as smooth—with as complete an abstraction of the gross, tangible impression, as any other part of the picture ; his trees are perfectly beautiful, but quite immovable ; they have a look of enchantment. In short, his landscapes are unequalled imitations of nature, released from its subjection to the elements,—as if all objects were become a delightful fairy vision, and the eye had rarefied and refined away the other senses.

The gusto in the Greek statues is of a very singular kind. The sense of perfect form nearly occupies the whole mind, and hardly suffers it to dwell on any other feeling. It seems enough for them *to be*, without acting or suffering. Their forms are ideal, spiritual. Their beauty is power. By their beauty they are raised above the frailties of pain or passion ; by their beauty they are deified.

The infinite quantity of dramatic invention in Shakespeare takes from his gusto. The power he delights to show is not intense, but discursive. He never insists on anything as much as he might, except a quibble. Milton has great gusto. He repeats his blow twice ; grapples

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with and exhausts his subject. His imagination has a double relish of its objects, an inveterate attachment to the things he describes, and to the words describing them.

"Or where Chineses drive
With sails and wind their *carry* waggons *light*."

"Wild above rule or art, *enormous* bliss."

There is a gusto in Pope's compliments, in Dryden's satires, and Prior's tales; and, among prose-writers, Boccaccio and Rabelais had the most of it. We will only mention one other work which appears to us to be full of gusto, and that is the *Beggar's Opera*. If it is not, we are altogether mistaken in our notions on this delicate subject.

On Pedantry

The power of attaching an interest to the most trifling or painful pursuits, in which our whole attention and faculties are engaged, is one of the greatest happinesses of our nature. The common soldier mounts the breach with joy; the miser deliberately starves himself to death; the mathematician sets about extracting the cube root with a feeling of enthusiasm; and the lawyer sheds tears of admiration over Coke upon Littleton. It is the same through human life. He who is not in some measure a pedant, though he may be a wise, cannot be a very happy, man.

The chief charm of reading the old novels is from the picture they give of the egotism of the characters, the importance of each individual to himself, and his fancied superiority over everyone else. We like, for instance, the pedantry of Parson Adams, who thought a schoolmaster the greatest character in the world, and that he was the greatest schoolmaster in it. We do not see any equivalent for the satisfaction which this conviction must have afforded him in the most nicely graduated scale of talents and accomplishments to which he was an utter stranger. When the old-fashioned Scotch pedagogue turns

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art, and are equally happy in their knowledge or their ignorance? The ignorant and pretending physician is a capital character in Molière: and, indeed, throughout his whole plays, the great source of the comic interest is in the fantastic exaggeration of blind self-love, in letting loose the habitual peculiarities of each individual from all restraint of conscious observation or self-knowledge, in giving way to that specific levity of impulse which mounts at once to the height of absurdity, in spite of the obstacles that surround it, as a fluid in a barometer rises according to the pressure of the external air! His characters are almost always pedantic, and yet the most unconscious of all others. Take, for example, those two worthy gentlemen, Monsieur Jourdain and Monsieur Pourceaugnac.

Learning and pedantry were formerly synonymous: and it was well when they were so. Can there be a higher satisfaction than for a man to understand Greek, and to believe that there is nothing else worth understanding? Learning is the knowledge of that which is not generally known. What an ease and a dignity in pretensions, founded on the ignorance of others! What a pleasure in wondering, what a pride in being wondered at! In the library of the family where we were brought up, stood the *Fratres Poloni*; and we can never forget or describe the feeling with which not only their appearance, but the names of the authors on the outside, inspired us. Pripseovius, we remember, was one of the easiest to pronounce. The gravity of the contents seemed in pro-

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portion to the weight of the volumes; the importance of the subjects increased with our ignorance of them. The trivialness of the remarks, if ever we looked into them, the repetitions, the monotony, only gave a greater solemnity to the whole, as the slowness and minuteness of the evidence adds to the impressiveness of a judicial proceeding. We knew that the authors had devoted their whole lives to the production of these works, carefully abstaining from the introduction of anything amusing, or lively, or interesting. In ten folio volumes there was not one sally of wit, one striking reflection. What then must have been their sense of the importance of the subject, the profound stores of knowledge which they had to communicate! "From all this world's encumbrance they did themselves assoil." Such was the notion we then had of this learned lumber; yet we would rather have this feeling again for one half-hour than be possessed of all the acuteness of Bayle or the wit of Voltaire! .

It may be considered as a sign of the decay of piety and learning, in modern times, that our divines no longer introduce texts of the original Scriptures into their sermons. The very sound of the original Hebrew or Greek would impress the hearer with a more lively faith in the sacred writers than any translation, however literal or correct. It may even be doubted whether the translation of the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue was any advantage to the people. The mystery in which particular points of faith were left involved, gave an awe and sacredness to

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religious opinions: the general purport of the truths and promises of revelation was made known by other means; and nothing beyond this general and implicit conviction can be obtained, where all is undefined and infinite.

Again, it may be questioned whether, in matters of mere human reasoning, much has been gained by the disuse of the learned languages. Sir Isaac Newton wrote in Latin; and it is perhaps one of Bacon's copperies that he translated his works into English. If certain follies have been exposed by being stripped of their formal disguise, others have had a greater chance of succeeding, by being presented in a more pleasing and popular shape. This has been remarkably the case in France (the least pedantic country in the world), where the women mingle with everything, even with metaphysics, and where all philosophy is reduced to a set of phrases for the toilette. When books are written in the prevailing language of the country, everyone becomes a critic who can read. An author is no longer tried by his peers. A species of universal suffrage is introduced in letters, which is only applicable to politics. The good old Latin style of our forefathers, if it concealed the dulness of the writer, at least was a barrier against the impertinence, slippancy, and ignorance of the reader. However, the immediate transition from the pedantic to the popular style in literature was a change that must have been very delightful at the time. Our illustrious predecessors, the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, were very

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happily off in this respect. They wore the public favour in its newest gloss, before it had become tarnished and common—before familiarity had bred contempt. It was the honeymoon of authorship. Their Essays were among the first instances in this country of learning sacrificing to the graces, and of a mutual understanding and good-humoured equality between the writer and the reader. This new style of composition, to use the phraseology of Mr. Burke, “mitigated authors into companions, and compelled wisdom to submit to the soft collar of social esteem”. The original papers of the *Tatler*, printed on a half sheet of common foolscap, were regularly served up at breakfast-time with the silver tea-kettle and thin slices of bread and butter; and what the ingenious Mr. Bickerstaff wrote over night in his easy chair, he might flatter himself would be read the next morning with elegant applause by the fair, the witty, the learned, and the great, in all parts of this kingdom, in which civilization had made any considerable advances. The perfection of letters is when the highest ambition of the writer is to please his readers, and the greatest pride of the reader is to understand his author. The satisfaction on both sides ceases when the town becomes a club of authors, when each man stands with his manuscript in his hand waiting for his turn of applause, and when the claims on our admiration are so many that, like those of common beggars, to prevent imposition, they can only be answered with general neglect. Our self-love would be quite bankrupt, if critics

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by profession did not come forward a bolder, to keep off the crowd, and to relieve us from the importunity of these innumerable candidates for fame, by pointing out their faults, and passing over their beauties. In the more auspicious period just alluded to, an author was regarded by the better sort as a man of genius,—and by the vulgar, as a kind of prodigy; inasmuch that the Spectator was obliged to shorten his residence at his friend Sir Roger de Coverley's, from his being taken for a conjuror. Every state of society has its advantages and disadvantages. An author is at present in no danger of being taken for a conjuror!

On Pedantry (*Cont.*)

Life is the art of being well deceived; and, in order that the deception may succeed, it must be habitual and uninterrupted. A constant examination of the value of our opinions and enjoyments, compared with those of others, may lessen our prejudices, but will leave nothing for our affections to rest upon. A multiplicity of objects unsettles the mind, and destroys not only all enthusiasm, but all sincerity of attachment, all constancy of pursuit; as persons accustomed to an itinerant mode of life never feel themselves at home in any place. It is by means of habit that our intellectual employments mix like our food with the circulation of the blood, and go on like any other part of the animal functions. To take away the force of habit and prejudice entirely is to strike at the root of our personal existence. The book-worm, buried in the depth of his researches, may well say to the obtrusive shifting realities of the world,—“Leave me to my repose!” We have seen an instance of a poetical enthusiast, who would have passed his life very comfortably in the contemplation of *his own idea*, if he had not been disturbed in his reverie by the Reviewers; and, for our own parts, we

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think we could pass our lives very learnedly and classically in one of the quadrangles at Oxford, without any idea at all, vegetating merely on the air of the place. Chaucer has drawn a beautiful picture of a true scholar in his Clerk of Oxenforde :—

" A Clerk ther was of Oxenforde also,
That unto logike hadde long ygo
As lene was his horse as is a rake,
And he was not right fat, I undertake;
But loked holwe, and thereto soberly.
Ful thredbare was his oerest courtepy,
For he hadde geten him yet no benefice,
Ne was so worldly for to have office.
For him was never have at his beddes hed,
A twenty bokes, clothed in black or red,
Of Aristotle and his philosophie,
Than robes riche, or fidel, or sautrie.
But all be that he was a philosophre,
Yet hadde he but litel gold in cosfre,
But all that he might of his frendes hente,
On bokes and on lerning he it spente,
And besily gan for the soules praic
Of hem, that gave him wherwith to scolaie.
Of studie toke he moste cure and most hede.
Not a word spake he more then was nede;
And that was sail in forme and reverence,
And short, and quike, and full of high sentence.
Sowning in moral vertue was his speche,
And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche."

If letters have profited little by throwing down the barrier between learned prejudice and ignorant presumption, the arts have profited still less by the universal diffusion of accomplishment and pretension. An artist is no

longer looked upon as anything who is not at the same time "chemist, statesman, fiddler, and buffoon". It is expected of him that he should be well-dressed, and he is poor; that he should move gracefully, and he has never learned to dance; that he should converse on all subjects, and he understands but one; that he should be read in different languages, and he only knows his own. Yet there is one language, the language of Nature, in which it is enough for him to be able to read, to find everlasting employment and solace to his thoughts—

"Tongues in the trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything".

He will find no end of his labours nor of his triumphs there; yet still feel all his strength not more than equal to the task he has begun—his whole life too short for art. Rubens complained that just as he was beginning to understand his profession he was forced to quit it. It was a saying of Michael Angelo, that "painting was jealous, and required the whole man to herself". Is it to be supposed that Rembrandt did not find sufficient resources against the spleen in the little cell, where mystery and silence hung upon his pencil, or the noontide ray penetrated the solemn gloom around him, without the aid of modern newspapers, novels, and reviews? Was he not more wisely employed, while devoted solely to his art—married to that immortal bride! We do not imagine Sir Joshua Reynolds was much happier for having written his lectures, nor for

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the learned society he kept, friendship apart; and learned society is not necessary to friendship. He was evidently, as far as conversation was concerned, little at his ease in it; and he was always glad, as he himself said, after he had been entertained at the houses of the great, to get back to his painting-room again. Any one settled pursuit, together with the ordinary alternations of leisure, exercise, amusement, and the natural feelings and relations of society, is quite enough to take up the whole of our thoughts, time, and affections; and anything beyond this will, generally speaking, only tend to dissipate and distract the mind. There is no end of accomplishments, of the prospect of new acquisitions of taste or skill, or of the uneasiness arising from the want of them, if we once indulge in this idle habit of vanity and affectation. The mind is never satisfied with what it is, but is always looking out for fanciful perfections, which it can neither attain nor practise. Our failure in any one object is fatal to our enjoyment of all the rest; and the chances of disappointment multiply with the number of our pursuits. In catching at the shadow, we lose the substance. No man can thoroughly master more than one art or science. The world has never seen a perfect painter. What would it have availed for Raphael to have aimed at Titian's colouring, or for Titian to have imitated Raphael's drawing, but to have diverted each from the true bent of his natural genius, and to have made each sensible of his own deficiencies, without any probability of supplying them? Pedantry in art,

in learning, in everything, is the setting an extraordinary value on that which we can do, and that which we understand best, and which it is our business to do and understand. Where is the harm of this? To possess or even understand all kinds of excellence equally is impossible; and to pretend to admire that to which we are indifferent, as much as that which is of the greatest use, and which gives the greatest pleasure to us, is not liberality, but affectation. Is an artist, for instance, to be required to feel the same admiration for the works of Handel as for those of Raphael? If he is sincere, he cannot: and a man, to be free from pedantry, must be either a coxcomb or a hypocrite. Vestris was so far in the right, in saying that Voltaire and he were the two greatest men in Europe. Voltaire was so in the public opinion, and he was so in his own. Authors and literary people have been unjustly accused for arrogating an exclusive preference to letters over other arts. They are justified in doing this, because words are the most natural and universal language, and because they have the sympathy of the world with them. Poets, for the same reason, have a right to be the vainest of authors. The prejudice attached to established reputation is, in like manner, perfectly well founded, because that which has longest excited our admiration and the admiration of mankind, is most entitled to admiration, on the score of habit, sympathy, and deference to public opinion. There is a sentiment attached to classical reputation, which cannot belong to

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new works of genius, till they become old in their turn.

There appears to be a natural division of labour in the ornamental as well as the mechanical arts of human life. We do not see why a nobleman should wish to shine as a poet, any more than to be dubbed a knight, or to be created Lord Mayor of London! If he succeeds, he gains nothing; and then if he is damned, what a ridiculous figure he makes! The great, instead of rivalling them, should keep authors, as they formerly kept fools—a practice in itself highly laudable, and the disuse of which might be referred to as the first symptom of the degeneracy of modern times, and dissolution of the principles of social order! But of all the instances of a profession now unjustly obsolete, commend us to the alchemist. We see him sitting fortified in his prejudices, with his furnace, his diagrams, and his alembics; smiling at disappointments as proofs of the sublimity of his art, and the earnest of his future success: wondering at his own knowledge and the incredulity of others; sed with hope to the last gasp, and having all the pleasures without the pain of madness. What is there in the discoveries of modern chemistry equal to the very names of the *Elixir Vita* and the *Aureum Potabile*!

In *Freissart's Chronicles* there is an account of a reverend Monk, who had been a robber in the early part of his life, and who, when he grew old, used seemingly to lament that he had ever changed his profession. He said, "it was a

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goodly sight to sally out from his castle, and to see a troop of jolly fellows coming riding that way, with their mules well laden with viands and rich stores, to advance towards them, to attack and overthrow them, returning to the castle with a noble booty". He preferred this mode of life to counting his beads and chunting his vespers, and repented that he had ever been prevailed on to relinquish so laudable a calling. In this confession of remorse we may be sure that there was no hypocrisy.

The difference in the character of the gentlemen of the present age, and those of the old school, has been often insisted on. The character of a gentleman is a *relative term*, which can hardly subsist where there is no marked distinction of persons. The diffusion of knowledge, of artificial and intellectual equality, tends to level this distinction, and to confound that nice perception, and high sense of honour, which arises from conspicuousness of situation, and a perpetual attention to personal propriety and the claims of personal respect. The age of chivalry is gone with the improvements in the art of war, which superseded the exercise of personal courage; and the character of a gentleman must disappear with those general refinements in manners, which render the advantages of rank and situation accessible almost to everyone. The bag-wig and sword naturally followed the fate of the helmet and the spear, when these outward insignia no longer implied acknowledged superiority, and were a distinction without a difference.

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The spirit of chivalrous and romantic love proceeded on the same exclusive principle. It was an enthusiastic adoration, an idolatrous worship paid to sex and beauty. This, even in its blindest excess, was better than the cold indifference and prostituted gallantry of this philosophic age. The extreme tendency of civilization is to dissipate all intellectual energy, and dissolve all moral principle. We are sometimes inclined to regret the innovations on the Catholic religion. It was a noble charter for ignorance, dulness, and prejudice of all kinds, (perhaps, after all, "the sovereign'st things on earth",) and put an effectual stop to the vanity and restlessness of opinion. "It wrapped the human understanding all round like a blanket." Since the Reformation, altars, unsprinkled by holy oil, are no longer sacred: and thrones, unsupported by divine right, have become uneasy and insecure.

On Actors and Acting

Players are “the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time”; the motley representatives of human nature. They are the only honest hypocrites. Their life is a voluntary dream; a studied madness. The height of their ambition is to be *beside themselves*. To-day kings, to-morrow beggars; it is only when they are themselves that they are nothing. Made up of mimic laughter and tears, passing from the extremes of joy or woe at the prompter’s call, they wear the livery of other men’s fortunes; their very thoughts are not their own. They are, as it were, train-bearers in the pageant of life, and hold a glass up to humanity, frailler than itself. We see ourselves at second-hand in them: they show us all that we are, all that we wish to be, and all that we dread to be. The stage is an epitome, a bettered likeness of the world, with the dull part left out: and, indeed, with this omission, it is nearly big enough to hold all the rest. What brings the resemblance nearer is that, as *they* imitate us, we, in our turn, imitate them. How many fine gentlemen do we owe to the stage! How many romantic lovers are mere Romeos

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in masquerade! How many soft bosoms have heaved with Juliet's sighs! They teach us when to laugh and when to weep, when to love and when to hate, upon principle and with a good grace! Wherever there is a play-house, the world will go on not amiss. The stage not only refines the manners, but it is the best teacher of morals, for it is the truest and most intelligible picture of life. It stamps the image of virtue on the mind by first softening the rude materials of which it is composed, by a sense of pleasure. It regulates the passions, by giving a loose to the imagination. It points out the selfish and depraved to our detestation; the amiable and generous to our admiration; and if it clothes the more seductive vices with the borrowed graces of wit and fancy, even those graces operate as a diversion to the coarser poison of experience and bad example, and often prevent or carry off the infection by inoculating the mind with a certain taste and elegance. To show how little we agree with the common declamations against the immoral tendency of the stage on this score, we will hazard a conjecture that the acting of the Beggar's Opera a certain number of nights every year since it was first brought out has done more towards putting down the practice of highway robbery than all the gibbets that ever were erected. A person, after seeing this piece, is too deeply imbued with a sense of humanity, is in too good humour with himself and the rest of the world, to set about cutting throats or rifling pockets.

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Whatever makes a jest of vice leaves it too much a matter of indifference for anyone in his senses to rush desperately on his ruin for its sake. We suspect that just the contrary effect must be produced by the representation of George Barnwell, which is too much in the style of the Ordinary's sermon to meet with any better success. The mind, in such cases, instead of being deterred by the alarming consequences held out to it, revolts against the denunciation of them as an insult offered to its free-will, and, in a spirit of defiance, returns a practical answer to them by daring the worst that can happen. The most striking lesson ever read to levity and licentiousness is in the last act of the *Inconstant*, where young Mirabel is preserved by the fidelity of his mistress, Orinda, in the disguise of a page, from the hands of assassins, into whose power he had been allured by the temptations of vice and beauty. There never was a rake who did not become in imagination a reformed man during the representation of the last trying scenes of this admirable comedy.

If the stage is useful as a school of instruction, it is no less so as a source of amusement. It is a source of the greatest enjoyment at the time, and a never-failing fund of agreeable reflection afterwards. The merits of a new play, or of a new actor, are always among the first topics of polite conversation. One way in which public exhibitions contribute to refine and humanize mankind is by supplying them with ideas and subjects of conversation and

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interest in common. The progress of civilization is in proportion to the number of common-places current in society. For instance, if we meet with a stranger at an inn or in a stage-coach, who knows nothing but his own affairs —his shop, his customers, his farm, his pigs, his poultry—we can carry on no conversation with him on these local and personal matters: the only way is to let him have all the talk to himself. But if he has fortunately ever seen Mr. Liston act, this is an immediate topic of mutual conversation, and we agree together the rest of the evening in discussing the merits of that inimitable actor with the same satisfaction as in talking over the affairs of the most intimate friend.

If the stage thus introduces us familiarly to our contemporaries, it also brings us acquainted with former times. It is an interesting revival of past ages, manners, opinions, dresses, persons, and actions,—whether it carries us back to the wars of York and Lancaster, or half-way back to the heroic times of Greece and Rome, in some translation from the French, or quite back to the age of Charles II in the scenes of Congreve and of Etherege (the gay Sir George!) —happy age, when kings and nobles led purely ornamental lives; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study went no farther than the choice of a sword-knot, or the adjustment of a side curl; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing elegance of dress; and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies

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in giddy maze through the walks of St. James's Park!

A good company of comedians, a Theatre-Royal judiciously managed, is your true Herald's College; the only Antiquarian Society that is worth a rush. It is for this reason that there is such an air of romance about players, and that it is pleasanter to see them, even in their own persons, than any of the three learned professions. We feel more respect for John Kemble in a plain coat than for the Lord Chancellor on the woolsack. He is surrounded, to our eyes, with a greater number of imposing recollections: he is a more reverend piece of formality; a more complicated tissue of costume. We do not know whether to look upon this accomplished actor as Pierre, or King John, or Coriolanus, or Cato, or Leontes, or the Stranger. But we see in him a stately hieroglyphic of humanity; a living monument of departed greatness; a sombre comment on the rise and fall of kings. We look after him till he is out of sight, as we listen to a story of one of Ossian's heroes, to "a tale of other times!"

The most pleasant feature in the profession of a player, and which, indeed, is peculiar to it, is that we not only admire the talents of those who adorn it, but we contract a personal intimacy with them. There is no class of society whom so many persons regard with affection as actors. We greet them on the stage; we like to meet them in the streets; they almost always recall to us pleasant associa-

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tions; and we feel our gratitude excited without the uneasiness of a sense of obligation. The very gaiety and popularity, however, which surround the life of a favourite performer make the retiring from it a very serious business. It glances a mortifying reflection on the shortness of human life and the vanity of human pleasures. Something reminds us that "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players".

It has been considered as the misfortune of first-rate talents for the stage that they leave no record behind them except that of vague rumour, and that the genius of a great actor perishes with him, "leaving the world no copy". This is a misfortune, or at least a mortifying reflection, to actors; but it is, perhaps, an advantage to the stage. It leaves an opening to originality. The *semper varium et mutabile* of the poet may be transferred to the stage, "the inconstant stage", without losing the original felicity of the application:—it has its necessary ebbs and flows, from its subjection to the influence of popular feeling, and the frailty of the materials of which it is composed, its own fleeting and shadowy essence, and cannot be expected to remain for any great length of time stationary at the same point, either of perfection or debasement. Acting, in particular, which is the chief organ by which it addresses itself to the mind — the eye, tongue, hand by which it dazzles, charms, and seizes on the public attention—is an art that seems to contain in itself the seeds of

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perpetual renovation and decay, following in this respect the order of nature rather than the analogy of the productions of human intellect;—for whereas in the other arts of painting and poetry, the standard works of genius, being permanent and accumulating, for awhile provoke emulation, but, in the end, overlay future efforts, and transmit only their defects to those that come after; the exertions of the greatest actor die with him, leaving to his successors only the admiration of his name and the aspiration after imaginary excellence: so that, in effect, no one generation of actors binds another; the art is always setting out afresh on the stock of genius and nature, and the success depends (generally speaking) on incident, opportunity, and encouragement. The harvest of excellence (whatever it may be) is removed from the ground every twenty or thirty years, by Death's sickle; and there is room left for another to sprout up and tower to any equal height, and spread into equal luxuriance—to “dally with the wind and court the sun”—according to the health and vigour of the stem, and the favourableness of the season. But books, pictures, remain like fixtures in the public mind, beyond a certain point encumber the soil of living truth and nature, distort or stunt the growth of original genius. When an author dies, it is no matter, for his works remain. When a great actor dies there is a void produced in society, a gap which requires to be filled up. The literary amateur may find employment for his time in

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reading old authors only, and exhaust his entire spleen in scouting new ones: but the lover of the stage cannot amuse himself, in his solitary fastidiousness, by sitting to witness a play got up by the departed ghosts of first-rate actors; or be contented with the perusal of a collection of old play-bills:—he may extol Garrick, but he must go to see Kean; and, in his own defence, must admire, or at least tolerate, what he sees, or stay away against his will. If, indeed, by any spell or power of necromancy, all the celebrated actors, for the last hundred years, could be made to appear again on the boards of Covent-Garden and Drury Lane for the last time, in their most brilliant parts, what a rich treat to the town, what a feast for the critics to go and see Betterton, and Booth, and Wilks, and Sandford, and Nokes, and Leigh, and Penkethman, and Bullock, and Estcourt, and Dogget, and Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Montfort, and Mrs. Oldfield, and Mrs. Bracegirdle, and Mrs. Cibber, and Cibber himself, the prince of coxcombs, and Macklin, and Quin, and Rich, and Mrs. Clive, and Mrs. Pritchard, and Mrs. Abington, and Weston, and Shuter, and Garrick, and all the rest of those who “gladdened life, and whose death eclipsed the gaiety of nations”! We should certainly be there. We should buy a ticket for the season. We should enjoy *our hundred days* again. We should not miss a single night. We would not, for a great deal, be absent from Betterton’s Hamlet or his Brutus, or from Booth’s Cato, as it was first acted to

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the contending applause of Whigs and Tories. We should be in the first row when Mrs. Barry (who was kept by Lord Rochester, and with whom Otway was in love) played Monimia or Belvidera; and we suppose we should go to see Mrs. Bracegirdle (with whom all the world was in love) in all her parts. We should then know exactly whether Penkethman's manner of picking a chicken, and Bullock's mode of devouring asparagus answered to the ingenious account of them in the *Tatler*; and whether Dogget was equal to Dowton — whether Mrs. Montfort or Mrs. Abington was the finest lady — whether Wilks or Cibber was the best Sir Harry Wildair, — whether Macklin was really "the Jew that Shakespeare drew", and whether Garrick was, upon the whole, so great an actor as the world would have made him out! Many people have a strong desire to pry into the secrets of futurity; for our own parts, we should be satisfied if we had the power to recall the dead and live the past over again as often as we pleased! — Players, after all, have little reason to complain of their hard-earned, short-lived popularity. One thunder of applause from pit, boxes, and gallery is equal to a whole immortality of posthumous fame; and when we hear an actor (Liston), whose modesty is equal to his merit, declare that he would like to see a dog wag his tail in approbation, what must he feel when he sets the whole house in a roar! Besides, Fame, as if their reputation had been entrusted to her alone,

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has been particularly careful of the renown of her theatrical favourites: she forgets, one by one, and year by year those who have been great lawyers, great statesmen, and great warriors in their day; but the name of Garrick still survives with the works of Reynolds and of Johnson.

Actors have been accused, as a profession, of being extravagant and dissipated. While they are said to be so, as a piece of common cant, they are likely to continue so. But there is a sentence in Shakespeare which should be stuck as a label in the mouths of our beadle and whippers-in of morality: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not: and our vices would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues". With respect to the extravagance of actors, as a traditional character, it is not to be wondered at. They live from hand to mouth: they plunge from want into luxury; they have no means of making money *breed*, and all professions that do not live by turning money into money, or have not a certainty of accumulating it in the end by parsimony, spend it. Uncertain of the future, they make sure of the present moment. This is not unwise. Chilled with poverty, steeped in contempt, they sometimes pass into the sunshine of fortune, and are lifted to the very pinnacle of public favour; yet even there they cannot calculate on the continuance of success, but are, "like the giddy sailor on the mast, ready

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with every blast to topple down into the fatal bowels of the deep!" Besides, if the young enthusiast, who is smitten with the stage, and with the public as a mistress, were naturally a close *hark*, he would become or remain a city clerk instead of turning player. Again, with respect to the habit of convivial indulgence, an actor, to be a good one, must have a great spirit of enjoyment in himself — strong impulses, strong passions, and a strong sense of pleasure; for it is his business to imitate the passions and to communicate pleasure to others. A man of genius is not a machine. The neglected actor may be excused if he drinks oblivion of his disappointments; the successful one if he quaffs the applause of the world, and enjoys the friendship of those who are the friends of the favourites of fortune, in draughts of nectar. There is no path so steep as that of fame: no labour so hard as the pursuit of excellence. The intellectual excitement, inseparable from those professions which call forth all our sensibility to pleasure and pain, requires some corresponding physical excitement to support our failure, and not a little to allay the ferment of the spirits attendant on success. If there is any tendency to dissipation beyond this in the profession of a player, it is owing to the prejudices entertained against them—to that spirit of bigotry which in a neighbouring country would deny actors Christian burial after their death, and to that cant of criticism which, in our own, slurs over their characters, while living, with a half-witted

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jest. Players are only not so respectable as they might be, because their profession is not respected as it ought to be.

A London engagement is generally considered by actors as the *ne plus ultra* of their ambition, as "a consummation devoutly to be wished", as the great prize in the lottery of their professional life. But this appears to us, who are not in the secret, to be rather the prosaic termination of their adventurous career; it is the provincial commencement that is the poetical and truly enviable part of it. After that they have comparatively little to hope or fear. "The wine of life is drunk, and but the lees remain." In London they become gentlemen, and the King's servants: but it is the romantic mixture of the hero and the vagabond that constitutes the essence of the player's life. It is the transition from their real to their assumed characters, from the contempt of the world to the applause of the multitude, that gives its zest to the latter, and raises them as much above common humanity at night as in the daytime they are depressed below it. "Hurried from fierce extremes, by contrast made more fierce", — it is rags and a flock bed which give their splendour to a plume of feathers and a throne. We should suppose that if the most admired actor on the London stage were brought to confession on this point he would acknowledge that all the applause he had received from "brilliant and overflowing audiences" was nothing to the light-headed intoxication of unlooked-for success in a barn.

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In town actors are criticised: in country places they are wondered at, or hooted at: it is of little consequence which, so that the interval is not too long between. For ourselves we own that the description of the strolling player in *Gil Blas*, soaking his dry crusts in the well by the roadside, presents to us a perfect picture of human felicity.

On the Pleasure of Painting

“There is a pleasure in painting which none but painters know.” In writing, you have to contend with the world; in painting, you have only to carry on a friendly strife with Nature. You sit down to your task, and are happy. From the moment that you take up the pencil, and look Nature in the face, you are at peace with your own heart. No angry passions rise to disturb the silent progress of the work, to shake the hand, or dim the brow: no irritable humours are set afloat: you have no absurd opinions to combat, no point to strain, no adversary to crush, no fool to annoy—you are actuated by fear or favour to no man. There is “no juggling here”, no sophistry, no intrigue, no tampering with the evidence, no attempt to make black white, or white black: but you resign yourself into the hands of a greater power, that of Nature, with the simplicity of a child, and the devotion of an enthusiast—“study with joy her manner, and with rapture taste her style”. The mind is calm, and full at the same time. The hand and eye are equally employed. In tracing the commonest object, a plant or the stump of a tree, you learn something every moment. You perceive unexpected

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differences, and discover likenesses where you looked for no such thing. You try to set down what you see—find out an error, and correct it. You need not play tricks, or purposely mistake: with all your pains, you are still far short of the mark. Patience grows out of the endless pursuit, and turns it into a luxury. A streak in a flower, a wrinkle in a leaf, a tinge in a cloud, a stain in an old wall or ruin grey, are seized with avidity as the *spolia opima* of this sort of mental warfare, and furnish out labour for another half-day. The hours pass away untold, without chagrin, and without weariness; nor would you ever wish to pass them otherwise. Innocence is joined with industry, pleasure with business; and the mind is satisfied, though it is not engaged in thinking or in doing any mischief.

I have not much pleasure in writing these Essays, or in reading them afterwards; though I own I now and then meet with a phrase that I like, or a thought that strikes me as a true one. But after I begin them, I am only anxious to get to the end of them, which I am not sure I shall do, for I seldom see my way a page or even a sentence beforehand; and when I have as by a miracle escaped, I trouble myself little more about them. I sometimes have to write them twice over: then it is necessary to read the *proof*, to prevent mistakes by the printer; so that by the time they appear in a tangible shape, and one can con them over with a conscious, sidelong glance to the public approbation, they have lost their gloss and re-

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lish, and become "more tedious than a twice-told tale". For a person to read his own works over with any great delight, he ought first to forget that he ever wrote them. Familiarity naturally breeds contempt. It is, in fact, like poring fondly over a piece of blank paper: from repetition, the words convey no distinct meaning to the mind, are mere idle sounds, except that our vanity claims an interest and property in them. I have more satisfaction in my own thoughts than in dictating them to others: words are necessary to explain the impression of certain things upon me to the reader, but they rather weaken and draw a veil over than strengthen it to myself. However I might say with the poet, "My mind to me a kingdom is", yet I have little ambition "to set a throne or chair of state in the understandings of other men". The ideas we cherish most, exist best in a kind of shadowy abstraction,

"Pure in the last recesses of the mind";

and derive neither force nor interest from being exposed to public view. They are old familiar acquaintance, and any change in them, arising from the adventitious ornaments of style or dress, is little to their advantage. After I have once written on a subject, it goes out of my mind: my feelings about it have been melted down into words, and them I forget. I have, as it were, discharged my memory of its old habitual reckoning, and rubbed out the score of real sentiment. For the future, it exists only

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for the sake of others. But I cannot say, from my own experience, that the same process takes place in transferring our ideas to canvas; they gain more than they lose in the mechanical transformation. One is never tired of painting, because you have to set down not what you knew already, but what you have just discovered. In the former case, you translate feelings into words; in the latter, names into things. There is a continual creation out of nothing going on. With every stroke of the brush, a new field of enquiry is laid open; new difficulties arise, and new triumphs are prepared over them. By comparing the imitation with the original, you see what you have done, and how much you have still to do. The test of the senses is severer than that of fancy, and an over-match even for the delusions of our self-love. One part of a picture shames another, and you determine to paint up to yourself, if you cannot come up to Nature. Every object becomes lustrous from the light thrown back upon it by the mirror of art: by the aid of the pencil we may be said to touch and handle the objects of sight. The air-drawn visions that hover on the verge of existence have a bodily presence given them on the canvas: the form of beauty is changed into a substance: the dream and the glory of the universe is made "palpable to feeling as to sight".—And see! a rainbow starts from the canvas, with all its humid train of glory, as if it were drawn from its cloudy arch in heaven. The spangled landscape glitters with drops of dew after the shower. The

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“sleecy fools” show their coats in the gleams of the setting sun. The shepherds pipe their farewell notes in the fresh evening air. And is this bright vision made from a dead dull blank, like a bubble reflecting the mighty fabric of the universe? Who would think this miracle of Rubens’ pencil possible to be performed? Who, having seen it, would not spend his life to do the like? See how the rich fallows, the bare stubble-field, the scanty harvest-home, drag in Rembrandt’s landscapes! How often have I looked at them and Nature, and tried to do the same, till the very “light thickened”, and there was an earthiness in the feeling of the air! There is no end of the refinements of art and Nature in this respect. One may look at the misty glimmering horizon till the eye dazzles and the imagination is lost, in hopes to transfer the whole interminable expanse at one blow upon canvas. Wilson said, he used to try to paint the effect of the motes dancing in the setting sun. At another time, a friend coming into his painting-room when he was sitting on the ground in a melancholy posture, observed that his picture looked like a landscape after a shower: he started up with the greatest delight, and said: “That is the effect I intended to produce, but thought I had failed”. Wilson was neglected, and, by degrees, neglected his art to apply himself to brandy. His hand became unsteady, so that it was only by repeated attempts that he could reach the place, or produce the effect he aimed at; and when he had done a little to a picture, he would say to any ac-

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quaintance who chanced to drop in: "I have painted enough for one day; come, let us go somewhere". It was not so Claude left his pictures, or his studies on the banks of the Tiber, to go in search of other enjoyments, or ceased to gaze upon the glittering sunny vales and distant hills: and while his eye drank in the clear sparkling hues and lovely forms of Nature, his hand stamped them on the lucid canvas to last there for ever! One of the most delightful parts of my life was one fine summer, when I used to walk out of an evening to catch the last light of the sun, gemming the green slopes or russet lawns, and gilding tower or tree, while the blue sky gradually turning to purple and gold, or, skirted with dusky grey, hung its broad marble pavement over all, as we see it in the great master of Italian landscape. But to come to a more particular explanation of the subject.

The first head I ever tried to paint was an old woman with the upper part of the face shaded by her bonnet, and I certainly laboured it with great perseverance. It took me numberless sittings to do it. I have it by me still, and sometimes look at it with surprise, to think how much pains were thrown away to little purpose: —yet not altogether in vain if it taught me to see good in everything, and to know that there is nothing vulgar in Nature seen with the eye of science or of true art. Refinement creates beauty everywhere: it is the grossness of the spectator that discovers nothing but grossness in the object. Be this as it may, I spared no

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pains to do my best. If art was long, I thought that life was so too at that moment. I got in the general effect the first day: and pleased and surprised enough I was at my success. The rest was a work of time—of weeks and months (if need were) of patient toil and careful finishing. I had seen an old head by Rembrandt at Burleigh House, and if I could produce a head at all like Rembrandt in a year, in my life-time, it would be glory and felicity, and wealth and fame enough for me! The head I had seen at Burleigh was an exact and wonderful facsimile of Nature, and I resolved to make mine (as nearly as I could) an exact facsimile of Nature. I did not then, nor do I now, believe, with Sir Joshua, that the perfection of art consists in giving general appearances without individual details, but in giving general appearances with individual details. Otherwise, I had done my work the first day. But I saw something more in Nature than general effect, and I thought it worth my while to give it in the picture. There was a gorgeous effect of light and shade: but there was a delicacy as well as depth in the *chiaroscuro*, which I was bound to follow into all its dim and scarce perceptible variety of tone and shadow. Then I had to make the transition from a strong light to as dark a shade, preserving the masses, but gradually softening off the intermediate parts. It was so in Nature: the difficulty was to make it so in the copy. I tried, and failed again and again; I strove harder, and succeeded as I thought. The wrinkles in Rembrandt were not hard lines; but broken and

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irregular. I saw the same appearance in Nature, and strained every nerve to give it. If I could hit off this edgy appearance, and insert the reflected light in the furrows of old age in half a morning, I did not think I had lost a day. Beneath the shrivelled yellow parchment look of the skin, there was here and there a streak of the blood colour tinging the face; this I made a point of conveying, and did not cease to compare what I saw with what I did (with jealous lynx-eyed watchfulness) till I succeeded to the best of my ability and judgment. How many revisions were there! How many attempts to catch an expression which I had seen the day before! How often did we try to get the old position, and wait for the return of the same light? There was a puckering up of the lips a cautious introversion of the eye under the shadow of the bonnet, indicative of the feebleness and suspicion of old age, which at last we managed, after many trials and some quarrels to a tolerable nicety. The picture was never finished, and I might have gone on with it to the present hour. I used to set it on the ground when my day's work was done, and saw revealed to me with swimming eyes the birth of new hopes, and of a new world of objects. The painter thus learns to look at Nature with different eyes. He before saw her "as in a glass darkly but now face to face". He understands the texture and meaning of the visible universe, and "sees into the life of things", not by the help of mechanical instruments, but of the improved exercise of his faculties, and an intimate sym-

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pathy with Nature. The meanest thing is not lost upon him, for he looks at it with an eye to itself, not merely to his own vanity or interest, or the opinion of the world. Even where there is neither beauty nor use—if that ever were—still there is truth, and a sufficient source of gratification in the indulgence of curiosity and activity of mind. The humblest painter is a true scholar; and the best of scholars—the scholar of Nature. For myself, and for the real comfort and satisfaction of the thing, I had rather have been Jan Steen, or Gerard Dow, than the greatest casuist or philologer that ever lived. The painter does not view things in clouds or “mist, the common gloss of theologians”, but applies the same standard of truth and disinterested spirit of enquiry, that influence his daily practice, to other subjects. He perceives form, he distinguishes character. He reads men and books with an intuitive eye. He is a critic as well as a connoisseur. The conclusions he draws are clear and convincing, because they are taken from the things themselves. He is not a fanatic, a dupe, or a slave: for the habit of seeing for himself also disposes him to judge for himself. The most sensible men I know (taken as a class) are painters; that is, they are the most lively observers of what passes in the world about them, and the closest observers of what passes in their own minds. From their profession they in general mix more with the world than authors; and if they have not the same fund of acquired knowledge, are obliged to rely more on individual sagacity.

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I might mention the names of Opie, Fuseli, Northcote, as persons distinguished for striking description, and acquaintance with the subtle traits of character. Painters in ordinary society, or in obscure situations where their value is not known, and they are treated with neglect and indifference, have sometimes a forward self-sufficiency of manner: but this is not so much their fault as that of others. Perhaps their want of regular education may also be in fault in such cases. Richardson, who is very tenacious of the respect in which the profession ought to be held, tells a story of Michael Angelo, that after a quarrel between him and Pope Julius II, "upon account of a slight the artist conceived the pontiff had put upon him, Michael Angelo was introduced by a bishop, who, thinking to serve the artist by it, made it an argument that the Pope should be reconciled to him, because men of his profession were commonly ignorant, and of no consequence otherwise: his holiness, enraged at the bishop, struck him with his staff, and told him, it was he that was the blockhead, and affronted the man himself would not offend; the prelate was driven out of the chamber, and Michael Angelo had the Pope's benediction, accompanied with presents. This bishop had fallen into the vulgar error, and was rebuked accordingly."

Besides the exercise of the mind, painting exercises the body. It is a mechanical as well as a liberal art. To do anything, to dig a hole in the ground, to plant a cabbage, to hit a

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mark, to move a shuttle, to work a pattern,—in a word, to attempt to produce any effect, and to succeed, has something in it that gratifies the love of power, and carries off the restless activity of the mind of man. Indolence is a delightful but distressing state: we must be doing something to be happy. Action is no less necessary than thought to the instinctive tendencies of the human frame; and painting combines them both incessantly. The hand furnishes a practical test of the correctness of the eye; and the eye thus admonished, imposes fresh tasks of skill and industry upon the hand. Every stroke tells, as the verifying of a new truth; and every new observation, the instant it is made, passes into an act and emanation of the will. Every step is nearer what we wish, and yet there is always more to do. In spite of the facility, the fluttering grace, the evanescent hues, that play round the pencil of Rubens and Vandyke, however I may admire, I do not envy them this power so much as I do the slow, patient, laborious execution of Correggio, Leonardo da Vinci, and Andrea del Sarto, where every touch appears conscious of its charge, emulous of truth, and where the painful artist has so distinctly wrought,

“That you might almost say his picture thought!”

In the one case, the colours seem breathed on the canvas as by magic, the work and the wonder of a moment: in the other, they seem inlaid in the body of the work, and as if it took the artist years of unremitting labour and of

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delightful never-ending progress to perfection. Who would wish ever to come to the close of such works,—not to dwell on them, to return to them, to be wedded to them to the last? Rubens, with his florid, rapid style, complained that when he had just learned his art, he should be forced to die. Leonardo, in the slow advances of his, had lived long enough!

Painting is not, like writing, what is properly understood by a sedentary employment. It requires not indeed a strong, but a continued and steady, exertion of muscular power. The precision and delicacy of the manual operation makes up for the want of vehemence,—as to balance himself for any time in the same position the rope-dancer must strain every nerve. Painting for a whole morning gives one as excellent an appetite for one's dinner, as old Abraham Tucker acquired for his by riding over Banstead Downs. It is related of Sir Joshua Reynolds, that “he took no other exercise than what he used in his painting-room”, —the writer means in walking backwards and forwards to look at his picture; but the act of painting itself, of laying on the colours in the proper place, and proper quantity, was a much harder exercise than this alternate receding from and returning to the picture. This last would be rather a relaxation and relief than an effort. It is not to be wondered at, that an artist like Sir Joshua, who delighted so much in the sensual and practical part of his art, should have found himself at a considerable loss when the decay of his sight precluded him, for the

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last year or two of his life, from the following up of his profession,—“the source”, according to his own remark, “of thirty years’ uninterrupted enjoyment and prosperity to him”. It is only those who never think at all, or else who have accustomed themselves to brood incessantly on abstract ideas, that never feel *ennui*.

To give one instance more, and then I will have done with this rambling discourse. One of my first attempts was a picture of my father, who was then in a green old age, with strong-marked features, and scarred with the smallpox. I drew it with a broad light crossing the face, looking down, with spectacles on, reading. The book was Shaftesbury’s *Characteristics*, in a fine old binding, with Gribelin’s etchings. My father would as lieve it had been any other book; but for him to read was to be content, was “riches fineless”. The sketch promised well; and I set to work to finish it, determined to spare no time nor pains. My father was willing to sit as long as I pleased; for there is a natural desire in the mind of man to sit for one’s picture, to be the object of continued attention, to have one’s likeness multiplied; and besides his satisfaction in the picture, he had some pride in the artist, though he would rather I should have written a sermon than painted like Rembrandt or like Raphael. Those winter days, with the gleams of sunshine coming through the chapel windows, and cheered by the notes of the robin redbreast in our garden (that “ever in the haunch of winter sings”)

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—as my afternoon's work drew to a close,— were among the happiest of my life. When I gave the effect I intended to any part of the picture for which I had prepared my colours, when I imitated the roughness of the skin by a lucky stroke of the pencil, when I hit the clear pearly tone of a vein, when I gave the ruddy complexion of health, the blood circulating under the broad shadows of one side of the face, I thought my fortune made; or rather it was already more than made, in my fancying that I might one day be able to say with Correggio: “I also am a painter!” It was an idle thought, a boy's conceit; but it did not make me less happy at the time. I used regularly to set my work in the chair to look at it through the long evenings; and many a time did I return to take leave of it before I could go to bed at night. I remember sending it with a throbbing heart to the Exhibition, and seeing it hung up there by the side of one of the Honourable Mr. Skeffington (now Sir George). There was nothing in common between them, but that they were the portraits of two very good-natured men. I think, but am not sure, that I finished this portrait (or another afterwards) on the same day that the news of the battle of Austerlitz came: I walked out in the afternoon, and, as I returned, saw the evening star set over a poor man's cottage with other thoughts and feelings than I shall ever have again. Oh for the revolution of the great Platonic year, that those times might come over again! I could sleep out the three hundred and sixty-five

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thousand intervening years very contentedly!—The picture is left: the table, the chair, the window where I learned to construe Livy, the chapel where my father preached, remain where they were; but he himself is gone to rest, full of years, of faith, of hope, and charity!

The painter not only takes a delight in nature, he has a new and exquisite source of pleasure opened to him in the study and contemplation of works of art—

“Whate'er Lorraine light touch'd with soft'ning
hue,

Or savage Rosa dash'd, or learned Poussin
drew”.

He turns aside to view a country-gentleman's seat with eager looks, thinking it may contain some of the rich products of art. There is an air round Lord Radnor's park, for there hang the two Clades, the Morning and Evening of the Roman Empire—round Wilton House, for there is Vandyke's picture of the Pembroke family—round Blenheim, for there is his picture of the Duke of Buckingham's children, and the most magnificent collection of Rubenses in the world—at Knowsley, for there is Rembrandt's Hand-writing on the Wall—and at Burleigh, for there are some of Guido's angelic heads. The young artist makes a pilgrimage to each of these places, eyes them wistfully at a distance, “bosomed high in tufted trees”, and feels an interest in them of which the owner is scarce conscious: he enters the well-swept walks and echoing arch-ways, passes the threshold, is led

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through wainscoted-rooms, is shown the furniture, the rich hangings, the tapestry, the massive services of plate—and, at last, is ushered into the room where his treasure is, the idol of his vows—some speaking face or bright landscape! It is stamped on his brain, and lives there thenceforward, a tally for nature, and a test of art. He furnishes out the chambers of the mind from the spoils of time, picks and chooses which shall have the best places—nearest his heart. He goes away richer than he came, richer than the possessor; and thinks that he may one day return, when he perhaps shall have done something like them, or even from failure shall have learned to admire truth and genius more.

My first initiation in the mysteries of the art was at the Orleans Gallery: it was there I formed my taste, such as it is; so that I am irreclaimably of the old school in painting. I was staggered when I saw the works there collected, and looked at them with wondering and with longing eyes. A mist passed away from my sight: the scales fell off. A new sense came upon me, a new heaven and a new earth stood before me. I saw the soul speaking in the face—“hands that the rod of empire had swayed” in mighty ages past—“a forked mountain or blue promontory”,

“with trees upon ‘t
That nod unto the world, and mock our eyes with
air”.

Old Time had unlocked his treasures, and Fame

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stood portress at the door. We had all heard of the names of Titian, Raphael, Guido, Domenichino, the Caracci—but to see them face to face, to be in the same room with their deathless productions, was like breaking some mighty spell—was almost an effect of necromancy! From that time I lived in a world of pictures. Battles, sieges, speeches in parliament seemed mere idle noise and fury, “signifying nothing”, compared with those mighty works and dreaded names that spoke to me in the eternal silence of thought. This was the more remarkable, as it was but a short time before that I was not only totally ignorant of, but insensible to, the beauties of art. As an instance, I remember that one afternoon I was reading the *Provoked Husband* with the highest relish, with a green woody landscape of Ruysdael or Hobbima just before me, at which I looked off the book now and then, and wondered what there could be in that sort of work to satisfy or delight the mind.—at the same time asking myself, as a speculative question, whether I should ever feel an interest in it like what I took in reading Vanbrugh and Cibber?

I had made some progress in painting when I went to the Louvre to study, and I never did anything afterwards. I shall never forget conning over the catalogue which a friend lent me just before I set out. The pictures, the names of the painters, seemed to relish in the mouth. There was one of Titian’s “Mistress at her toilette”. Even the colours with which the painter had adorned her hair were not more golden,

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more amiable to sight, than those which played round and tantalized my fancy ere I saw the picture. There were two portraits by the same hand—"A young Nobleman with a glove"—another, "a companion to it"—I read the description over and over with fond expectancy, and filled up the imaginary outline with whatever I could conceive of grace, and dignity, and an antique *gusto*—all but equal to the original. There was the "Transfiguration" too. With what awe I saw it in my mind's eye, and was overshadowed with the spirit of the artist! Not to have been disappointed with these works afterwards, was the highest compliment I can pay to their transcendent merits. Indeed, it was from seeing other works of the same great masters that I had formed a vague, but no disparaging idea of these. The first day I got there, I was kept for some time in the French Exhibition room, and thought I should not be able to get a sight of the old masters. I just caught a peep at them through the door (vile hindrance), like looking out of purgatory into paradise—from Poussin's noble mellow-looking landscapes to where Rubens hung out his gaudy banner, and down the glimmering vista to the rich jewels of Titian and the Italian school. At last, by much importunity, I was admitted, and lost not an instant in making use of my new privilege. It was *un beau jour* to me. I marched delighted through a quarter of a mile of the proudest efforts of the mind of man, a whole creation of genius, a universe of art! I ran the gauntlet of all the schools from the

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bottom to the top; and in the end got admitted into the inner room, where they had been repairing some of their greatest works. Here the "Transfiguration", the "St. Peter Martyr", and the "St. Jerome" of Domenichino stood on the floor, as if they had bent their knees, like camels stooping, to unlade their riches to the spectator. On one side, on an easel, stood "Hippolito de Medici" (a portrait by Titian) with a boar-spear in his hand, looking through those he saw, till you turned away from the keen glance: and thrown together in heaps were landscapes of the same hand, green pastoral hills and vales, and shepherds piping to their mild mistresses underneath the flowering shade. Reader, "if thou hast not seen the Louvre, thou art damned!"—for thou hast not seen the choicest remains of the works of art; or thou hast not seen all these together, with their mutually reflected glories. I say nothing of the statues; for I know but little of sculpture, and never liked any till I saw the Elgin marbles. . . . Here, for four months together, I strolled and studied, and daily heard the warning sound—"Quatres heures passées, il faut fermer, Citoyens" (ah! why did they ever change their style?) muttered in coarse provincial French; and brought away with me some loose draughts and fragments, which I have been forced to part with, like drops of life-blood, for "hard money". How often, thou tenantless mansion of Godlike magnificence—how often has my heart since gone a pilgrimage to thee.

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It has been made a question, whether the artist, or the mere man of taste and natural sensibility, receives most pleasure from the contemplation of works of art? and I think this question might be answered by another as a sort of *experimentum crucis*, namely, whether any one out of that "number numberless" of mere gentlemen and amateurs, who visited Paris at the period here spoken of, felt as much interest, as much pride or pleasure, in this display of the most striking monuments of art as the humblest student would? The first entrance into the Louvre would be only one of the events of his journey, not an event in his life, remembered ever after with thankfulness and regret. He would explore it with the same unmeaning curiosity and idle wonder as he would the Regalia in the Tower, or the Botanic Garden in the Tuileries, but not with the fond enthusiasm of an artist. How should he? His is "casual fruition, joyless, unendeared".... But the painter is wedded to his art, the mistress, queen, and idol of his soul. He has embarked his all in it, fame, time, fortune, peace of mind, his hopes in youth, his consolation in age: and shall he not feel a more intense interest in whatever relates to it than the mere indolent trifler? Natural sensibility alone, without the entire application of the mind to that one object, will not enable the possessor to sympathize with all the degrees of beauty and power in the conceptions of a Titian or a Correggio; but it is he only who does this, who follows them into all their force and matchless grace, that does or

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can feel their full value. Knowledge is pleasure as well as power. No one but the artist who has studied nature, and contended with the difficulties of art, can be aware of the beauties, or intoxicated with a passion for painting. No one who has not devoted his life and soul to the pursuit of art can feel the same exultation in its brightest ornaments and loftiest triumphs that an artist does. Where the treasure is, there the heart is also. It is now seventeen years since I was studying in the Louvre (and I have long since given up all thoughts of the art as a profession), but long after I returned, and even still, I sometimes dream of being there again—of asking for the old pictures—and not finding them, or finding them changed or faded from what they were, I cry myself awake! What gentleman - amateur ever does this at such a distance of time,—that is, ever received pleasure or took interest enough in them to produce so lasting an impression?

But it is said that if a person had the same natural taste, and the same acquired knowledge as an artist, without the petty interests and technical notions, he would derive a purer pleasure from seeing a fine portrait, a fine landscape, and so on. This, however, is not so much begging the question as asking an impossibility: he cannot have the same insight into the end without having studied the means; nor the same love of art without the same habitual and exclusive attachment to it. Painters are, no doubt, often actuated by jealousy, partiality, and a sordid attention to that only which

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they find useful to themselves in painting. Wilkie has been seen poring over the texture of a Dutch cabinet picture, so that he could not see the picture itself. But this is the perversion and pedantry of the profession, not its true or genuine spirit. If Wilkie had never looked at anything but megilps and handlings, he never would have put the soul of life and manners into his pictures, as he has done. Another objection is, that the instrumental parts of the art, the means, the first rudiments, paints, oils, and brushes, are painful and disgusting; and that the consciousness of the difficulty and anxiety with which perfection has been attained, must take away from the pleasure of the finest performance. This, however, is only an additional proof of the greater pleasure derived by the artist from his profession; for these things, which are said to interfere with and destroy the common interest in works of art, do not disturb him; he never once thinks of them, he is absorbed in the pursuit of a higher object; he is intent, not on the means, but the end; he is taken up, not with the difficulties, but with the triumph over them. As in the case of the anatominist, who overlooks many things in the eagerness of his search after abstract truth; or the alchemist, who, while he is raking into his soot and furnaces, lives in a golden dream; a lesser gives way to a greater object. But it is pretended that the painter may be supposed to submit to the unpleasant part of the process only for the sake of the fame or profit in view. So far is this from being a true state of the case,

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that I will venture to say, in the instance of a friend of mine who has lately succeeded in an important undertaking in his art, that not all the fame he has acquired, not all the money he has received from thousands of admiring spectators, not all the newspaper puffs,—nor even the praise of the *Edinburgh Review*,—not all these, put together, ever gave him at any time the same genuine, undoubted satisfaction as any one half-hour employed in the ardent and propitious pursuit of his art—in finishing to his heart's content a foot, a hand, or even a piece of drapery. What is the state of mind of an artist while he is at work? He is then in the act of realizing the highest idea he can form of beauty or grandeur: he conceives, he embodies that which he understands and loves best: that is, he is in full and perfect possession of that which is to him the source of the highest happiness and intellectual excitement he can enjoy.

In short, as a conclusion to this argument, I will mention a circumstance which fell under my knowledge the other day. A friend had bought a print of Titian's "Mistress", the same to which I have alluded above. He was anxious to show it me on this account. I told him it was a spirited engraving, but it had not the look of the original. I believed he thought this fastidious, till I offered to show him a rough sketch of it, which I had by me. Having seen this, he said he perceived exactly what I meant, and could not bear to look at the print afterwards. He had good sense enough to see the difference in the individual instance; but a per-

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son better acquainted with Titian's manner, and with art in general, that is, of a more cultivated and refined taste, would know that it was a bad print, without having any immediate model to compare it with. He would perceive with a glance of the eye, with a sort of instinctive feeling, that it was hard, and without that bland, expansive, and nameless expression which always distinguished Titian's most famous works. Anyone who is accustomed to a head in a picture can never reconcile himself to a print from it: but to the ignorant they are both the same. To the vulgar eye there is no difference between a Guido and a daub, between a penny print or the vilest scrawl, and the most finished performance. In other words, all that excellence which lies between these two extremes—all, at least, that marks the excess above mediocrity—all that constitutes true beauty, harmony, refinement, grandeur, is lost upon the common observer. But it is from this point that the delight, the glowing raptures of the true adept commence. An uninformed spectator may like an ordinary drawing better than the ablest connoisseur; but for that very reason he cannot like the highest specimens of art so well. The refinements not only of execution, but of truth and nature, are inaccessible to unpractised eyes. The exquisite gradations in a sky of Claude's are not perceived by such persons, and consequently the harmony cannot be felt. When there is no conscious apprehension there can be no conscious pleasure. Wonder at the first sight of works of art may be the effect

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of ignorance and novelty; but real admiration and permanent delight in them are the growth of taste and knowledge. “I would not wish to have your eyes”, said a good-natured man to a critic, who was finding fault with a picture in which the other saw no blemish. Why so? The idea which prevented him from admiring this inferior production was a higher idea of truth and beauty which was ever present with him, and a continual source of pleasing and lofty contemplations. It may be different in a taste for outward luxuries and the privations of mere sense; but the idea of perfection, which acts as an intellectual soil, is always an addition, a support, and a proud consolation.

Richardson, in his Essays, which ought to be better known, has left some striking examples of the felicity and infelicity of artists, both as it relates to their external fortune and to the practice of their art. In speaking of the knowledge of hands, he exclaims—“When one is considering a picture or a drawing, one at the same time thinks this was done by him who had many extraordinary endowments of body and mind, but was withal very capricious; who was honoured in life and death, expiring in the arms of one of the greatest princes of that age, Francis I, King of France, who loved him as a friend. Another is of him who lived a long and happy life, beloved of Charles V, Emperour; and many others of the first princes of Europe. When one has another in hand, we think this was done by one who so excelled in three arts, as that any one of them in that

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degree had rendered him worthy of immortality; and one moreover that durst contend with his sovereign (one of the haughtiest popes that ever was) upon a slight offered to him, and extricated himself with honour. Another is the work of him who, without any one exterior advantage but mere strength of genius, had the most sublime imaginations, and executed them accordingly, yet lived and died obscurely. Another we shall consider as the work of him who restored painting when it had almost sunk: of him whom art made honourable, but who, neglecting and despising greatness with a sort of cynical pride, was treated suitably to the figure he gave himself, not his intrinsic worth; which, not having philosophy enough to bear it, broke his heart. Another is done by one who (on the contrary) was a fine gentleman, and lived in great magnificence, and was much honoured by his own and foreign princes; who was a courtier, a statesman, and a painter; and so much all these, that when he acted in either character, that seemed to be his business, and the others his diversion. I say, when one thus reflects, besides the pleasure arising from the beauties and excellences of the work, the fine ideas it gives us of natural things, the noble way of thinking it may suggest to us, an additional pleasure results from the above considerations. But, oh! the pleasure, when a connoisseur and lover of art has before him a picture or drawing, of which he can say, this is the hand, these are the thoughts of him who was one of the politest, best-natured gentlemen

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ever was; and beloved and assisted by the
utest wits and the greatest men then in Rome:
him who lived in great fame, honour, and
influence, and died extremely lamented;
missed a cardinal's hat only by dying a
months too soon; but was particularly
esteemed and favoured by two popes, the only
s who filled the chair of St. Peter in his
e, and as great men as ever sat there since
t apostle, if, at least, he ever did: one, in
rt, who could have been a Leonardo, a
chael Angelo, a Titian, a Correggio, a Par-
giano, an Annibal, a Rubens, or any other
om he pleased, but none of them could ever
e been a Raffaelle."—Page 251.

The same writer speaks feelingly of the
nge in the style of different artists from
ir change of fortune, and, as the circum-
naces are little known, I will quote the
sage relating to two of them.

"Guido Reni, from a prince-like affluence of
une (the just reward of his angelic works),
to a condition like that of a hired servant
one who supplied him with money for what
did at a fixed rate; and that by his being
witched with a passion for gaming, whereby
lost vast sums of money; and even what he
t in this his state of servitude by day, he com-
only lost at night: nor could he ever be cured
this cursed madness. Those of his works,
erefore, which he did in this unhappy part of
s life, may easily be conceived to be in a dif-
ent style to what he did before, which in some
ings, that is, in the airs of his heads (in the

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gracious kind), had a delicacy in them peculiar to himself, and almost more than human. But I must not multiply instances. Parmegiano is one that alone takes in all the several kinds of variation, and all the degrees of goodness, from the lowest of the indifferent up to the sublime. I can produce evident proofs of this in so easy a gradation, that one cannot deny but that he that did this, might do that, and very probably did so; and thus one may ascend and descend, like the angels on Jacob's ladder, whose foot was upon the earth, but its top reached to heaven.

“And this great man had his unlucky circumstance: he became mad after the philosopher's stone, and did but very little in painting or drawing afterwards. Judge what that was, and whether there was not an alteration of style from what he had done, before this devil possessed him. His creditors endeavoured to exorcise him, and did him some good, for he set himself to work again in his own way: but if a drawing I have of a Lucretia be that he made for his last picture, as it probably is (Vasari says that was the subject of it), it is an evident proof of his decay: it is good indeed, but it wants much of the delicacy which is commonly seen in his works; and so I always thought before I knew or imagined it to be done in this his ebb of genius.”—Page 153.

We have had two artists of our own country whose fate has been as singular as it was hard. Gandy was a portrait-painter in the beginning of the last century, whose heads were said to

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ve come near to Rembrandt's, and he was the idoubted prototype of Sir Joshua Reynolds's style. Yet his name has scarcely been heard ; and his reputation, like his works, never tended beyond his own county. What did he think of himself and of a fame so bounded? Did he ever dream he was indeed an artist? or how did this feeling in him differ from the vulgar conceit of the lowest pretender? The best known of his works is a portrait of an Alderman of Exeter, in some public building in that city.

Poor Dan Stringer! Forty years ago he had the finest hand and the clearest eye of any artist of his time, and produced heads and drawings that would not have disgraced a brighter period in the art. But he fell a martyr (like Burns) to the society of country gentlemen, and then of those whom they would consider as more his equals. I saw him many years ago, when he exhibited the masterly sketches he had by him—one in particular of the group of citizens in Shakespeare "swallowing the tailor's news") as bastards of his genius, not his children"; and seemed to have given up all thoughts of art. Whether he is since dead, I cannot say: the world do not so much as know that he ever lived!

The Indian Jugglers

Coming forward and seating himself on the ground in his white dress and tightened turban, the chief of the Indian Jugglers begins with tossing up two brass balls, which is what any of us could do, and concludes with keeping up four at the same time, which is what none of us could do to save our lives, nor if we were to take our whole lives to do it in. Is it then a trifling power we see at work, or is it not something next to miraculous? It is the utmost stretch of human ingenuity, which nothing but the bending the faculties of body and mind to it from the tenderest infancy with incessant, over-anxious application up to manhood, can accomplish or make even a slight approach to. Man, thou art a wonderful animal, and thy ways past finding out! Thou canst do strange things, but thou turnest them to little account!—To conceive of this effort of extraordinary dexterity distracts the imagination and makes admiration breathless. Yet it costs nothing to the performer, any more than if it were a mere mechanical deception with which he had nothing to do but to watch and laugh at the astonishment of the spectators. A single error of a hair's-breadth, of the

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smallest conceivable portion of time, would be fatal: the precision of the movements must be like a mathematical truth, their rapidity is like lightning. To catch four balls in succession in less than a second of time, and deliver them back so as to return with seeming consciousness to the hand again, to make them revolve round him at certain intervals, like the planets in their spheres, to make them chase one another like sparkles of fire, or shoot up like flowers or meteors, to throw them behind his back and twine them round his neck like ribbons or like serpents, to do what appears an impossibility, and to do it with all the ease, the grace, the carelessness imaginable, to laugh at, to play with the glittering mockeries, to follow them with his eye as if he could fascinate them with its lambent fire, or as if he had only to see that they kept time with the music on the stage—there is something in all this which he who does not admire may be quite sure he never really admired anything in the whole course of his life. It is skill surmounting difficulty, and beauty triumphing over skill. It seems as if the difficulty once mastered naturally resolved itself into ease and grace, and as if, to be overcome at all, it must be overcome without an effort. The smallest awkwardness or want of pliancy or self-possession would stop the whole process. It is the work of witchcraft, and yet sport for children. Some of the other feats are quite as curious and wonderful, such as the balancing the artificial tree and shooting a bird from each

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branch through a quill; though none of them have the elegance or facility of the keeping up of the brass balls. You are in pain for the result, and glad when the experiment is over; they are not accompanied with the same unmixed, unchecked delight as the former; and I would not give much to be merely astonished without being pleased at the same time. As to the swallowing of the sword, the police ought to interfere to prevent it. When I saw the Indian Juggler do the same things before, his feet were bare, and he had large rings on the toes, which kept turning round all the time of the performance as if they moved of themselves. — The hearing of a speech in Parliament, drawled or stammered out by the Honourable Member or the Noble Lord, the ringing the changes on their common-places, which anyone could repeat after them as well as they, stirs me not a jot, shakes not my good opinion of myself; but the seeing the Indian Jugglers does. It makes me ashamed of myself. I ask what is there that I can do as well as this? Nothing. What have I been doing all my life? Have I been idle, or have I nothing to show for all my labour and pains? Or have I passed my time in pouring words like water into empty sieves, rolling a stone up a hill and then down again, trying to prove an argument in the teeth of facts, and looking for causes in the dark and not finding them? Is there no one thing in which I can challenge competition, that I can bring as an instance of exact perfection, in which others cannot find

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a flaw. The utmost I can pretend to is, to write a description of what this fellow can do. I can write a book: so can many others who have not even learned to spell. What abortions are these Essays! What errors, what ill-pieceed transitions, what crooked reasons, what lame conclusions! How little is made out, and that little how ill! Yet they are the best I can do. I endeavour to recollect all I have ever observed or thought upon a subject, and to express it as nearly as I can. Instead of writing on four subjects at a time, it is as much as I can manage to keep the thread of one discourse clear and unentangled. I have also time on my hands to correct my opinions and polish my periods: but the one I cannot, and the other I will not do. I am fond of arguing: yet, with a good deal of pains and practice, it is often as much as I can do to beat my man; though he may be a very indifferent hand. A common fencer would disarm his adversary in the twinkling of an eye unless he were a professor like himself. A stroke of wit will sometimes produce this effect, but there is no such power or superiority in sense or reasoning. There is no complete mastery of execution to be shown there: and you hardly know the professor from the impudent pretender or the mere clown.

I have always had this feeling of the inefficacy and slow progress of intellectual compared to mechanical excellence, and it has always made me somewhat dissatisfied. It is a great many years since I saw Richer, the

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famous rope-dancer, perform at Sadler's Wells. He was matchless in his art, and added to his extraordinary skill exquisite ease and unaffected natural grace. I was at that time employed in copying a half-length picture of Sir Joshua Reynolds's; and it put me out of conceit with it. How ill this part was made out in the drawing! How heavy, how slovenly this other was painted! I could not help saying to myself: "If the rope-dancer had performed his task in this manner, leaving so many gaps and botches in his work, he would have broken his neck long ago; I should never have seen that vigorous elasticity of nerve and precision of movement!" — Is it then so easy an undertaking (comparatively) to dance on a tight-rope? Let anyone who thinks so get up and try. There is the thing. It is that which at first we cannot do at all, which in the end is done to such perfection. To account for this in some degree I might observe that mechanical dexterity is confined to doing some one particular thing, which you can repeat as often as you please, in which you know whether you succeed or fail, and where the point of perfection consists in succeeding in a given undertaking.—In mechanical efforts you improve by perpetual practice, and you do so infallibly, because the object to be attained is not a matter of taste or fancy, or opinion, but of actual experiment, in which you must either do the thing or not do it. If a man is put to aim at a mark with a bow and arrow, he must hit it or miss it, that's certain. He

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cannot deceive himself, and go on shooting wide or falling short, and still fancy that he is making progress. The distinction between right and wrong, between true and false, is here palpable; and he must either correct his aim or persevere in his error with his eyes open, for which there is neither excuse nor temptation. If a man is learning to dance on a rope, if he does not mind what he is about he will break his neck. After that it will be in vain for him to argue that he did not make a false step. His situation is not like that of Goldsmith's pedagogue:—

“In argument they own'd his wondrous skill,
And e'en though vanquish'd, he could argue still”.

Danger is a good teacher, and makes apt scholars. So are disgrace, defeat, exposure to immediate scorn and laughter. There is no opportunity in such cases for self-delusion, no idling time away, no being off your guard (or you must take the consequences)—neither is there any room for humour or caprice or prejudice. If the Indian Juggler were to play tricks in throwing up the three case-knives, which keep their positions like the leaves of a crocus in the air, he would cut his fingers. I can make a very bad antithesis without cutting my fingers. The tact of style is more ambiguous than that of double-edged instruments. If the Juggler were told that by flinging himself under the wheels of the Juggernaut, when the idol issues forth on a gaudy day, he would

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immediately be transported into Paradise, he might believe it, and nobody could disprove it. So the Brahmins may say what they please on that subject, may build up dogmas and mysteries without end and not be detected: but their ingenious countryman cannot persuade the frequenters of the Olympic Theatre that he performs a number of astonishing feats without actually giving proofs of what he says.—There is then in this sort of manual dexterity, first a gradual aptitude acquired to a given exertion of muscular power, from constant repetition, and in the next place an exact knowledge how much is still wanting and necessary to be supplied. The obvious test is to increase the effort or nicety of the operation and still to find it come true. The muscles ply instinctively to the dictates of habit. Certain movements and impressions of the hand and eye, having been repeated together an infinite number of times, are unconsciously but unavoidably cemented into closer and closer union; the limbs require little more than to be put in motion for them to follow a regular track with ease and certainty; so that the mere intention of the will acts mathematically, like touching the spring of a machine, and you come with Locksley in *Ivanhoe*, in shooting at a mark, “to allow for the wind”.

Farther, what is meant by perfection in mechanical exercises is the performing certain feats to a uniform nicety, that is, in fact, undertaking no more than you can perform. You task yourself, the limit you fix is optional, and

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no more than human industry and skill can attain to: but you have no abstract, independent standard of difficulty or excellence (other than the extent of your own powers). Thus he who can keep up four brass balls does this to perfection; but he cannot keep up five at the same instant, and would fail every time he attempted it. That is, the mechanical performer undertakes to emulate himself, not to equal another. But the artist undertakes to imitate another, or to do what nature has done, and this it appears is more difficult, viz. to copy what she has set before us in the face of nature or "human face divine", entire and without a blemish, than to keep up four brass balls at the same instant; for the one is done by the power of human skill and industry, and the other never was nor will be. Upon the whole, therefore, I have more respect for Reynolds than I have for Richer; for, happen how it will, there have been more people in the world who could dance on a rope like the one than who could paint like Sir Joshua. The latter was but a bungler in his profession to the other, it is true; but then he had a harder task-master to obey, whose will was more wayward and obscure, and whose instructions it was more difficult to practise. You can put a child apprentice to a tumbler or rope-dancer with a comfortable prospect of success, if they are but sound of wind and limb; but you cannot do the same thing in painting. The odds are a million to one. You may make indeed as many H——s and H——s,

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as you put into that sort of machine, but not one Reynolds amongst them all, with his grace, his grandeur, his blandness of gusto "in tones and gestures hit", unless you could make the man over again. To snatch this grace beyond the reach of art is then the height of art—where fine art begins, and where mechanical skill ends. The soft suffusion of the soul, the speechless breathing eloquence, the looks "commercing with the skies", the ever-shifting forms of an eternal principle, that which is seen but for a moment, but dwells in the heart always, and is only seized as it passes by strong and secret sympathy, must be taught by nature and genius, not by rules or study. It is suggested by feeling, not by laborious microscopic inspection: in seeking for it without, we lose the harmonious clue to it within: and in aiming to grasp the substance we let the very spirit of art evaporate. In a word, the objects of fine art are not the objects of sight but as these last are the objects of taste and imagination, that is, as they appeal to the sense of beauty, of pleasure, and of power in the human breast, and are explained by that finer sense and revealed in their inner structure to the eye in return. Nature is also a language. Objects, like words, have a meaning; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language, which he can only do by knowing its application to a thousand other objects in a thousand other situations. Thus the eye is too blind a guide of itself to distinguish between the warm or cold tone of a deep-blue

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sky, but another sense acts as a monitor to it, and does not err. The colour of the leaves in autumn would be nothing without the feeling that accompanies it; but it is that feeling that stamps them on the canvas, faded, seared, blighted, shrinking from the winter's flaw, and makes the sight as true as touch—

“And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
Cling to each leaf and hang on every bough”.

The more ethereal, evanescent, more refined and sublime part of art is the seeing nature through the medium of sentiment and passion, as each object is a symbol of the affections and a link in the chain of our endless being. But the unravelling this mysterious web of thought and feeling is alone in the Muse's gift, namely, in the power of that trembling sensibility which is awake to every change and every modification of its ever-varying impressions, that,

“Thrills in each nerve, and lives along the line”.

This power is indifferently called genius, imagination, feeling, taste; but the manner in which it acts upon the mind can neither be defined by abstract rules, as is the case in science, nor verified by continual unvarying experiments, as is the case in mechanical performances. The mechanical excellence of the Dutch painters in colouring and handling is that which comes the nearest in fine art to the perfection of certain manual exhibitions of

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skill. The truth of the effect and the facility with which it is produced are equally admirable. Up to a certain point everything is faultless. The hand and eye have done their part. There is only a want of taste and genius. It is after we enter upon that enchanted ground that the human mind begins to droop and flag as in a strange road, or in a thick mist, benighted and making little way with many attempts and many failures, and that the best of us only escape with half a triumph. The undefined and the imaginary are the regions that we must pass like Satan, difficult and doubtful, "half flying, half on foot". The object in sense is a positive thing, and execution comes with practice.

Cleverness is a certain knack or aptitude at doing certain things, which depend more on a particular adroitness and off-hand readiness than on force or perseverance, such as making puns, making epigrams, making extempore verses, mimicking the company, mimicking a style, &c. Cleverness is either liveliness and smartness, or something answering to sleight of hand, like letting a glass fall sideways off a table, or else a trick, like knowing the secret spring of a watch. Accomplishments are certain external graces, which are to be learned from others, and which are easily displayed to the admiration of the beholder, viz. dancing, riding, fencing, music, and so on. These ornamental acquirements are only proper to those who are at ease in mind and fortune. I know an individual who, if he had been born

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to an estate of five thousand a year, would have been the most accomplished gentleman of the age. He would have been the delight and envy of the circle in which he moved—would have graced by his manners the liberality flowing from the openness of his heart, would have laughed with the women, have argued with the men, have said good things and written agreeable ones, have taken a hand at picquet or the lead at the piano, and have set and sung his own verses—*nugae canorum*—with tenderness and spirit; a Rochester without the vice, a modern Surrey! As it is, all these capabilities of excellence stand in his way. He is too versatile for a professional man, not dull enough for a political drudge, too gay to be happy, too thoughtless to be rich. He wants the enthusiasm of the poet, the severity of the prose-writer, and the application of the man of business.—Talent is the capacity of doing anything that depends on application and industry, such as writing a criticism, making a speech, studying the law. Talent differs from genius, as voluntary differs from involuntary power. Ingenuity is genius in trifles, greatness is genius in undertakings of much pith and moment. A clever or ingenious man is one who can do anything well, whether it is worth doing or not: a great man is one who can do that which when done is of the highest importance. Themistocles said he could not play on the flute, but that he could make of a small city a great one. This gives one a pretty good idea of the distinction in question.

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Greatness is great power, producing great effects. It is not enough that a man has great power in himself, he must show it to all the world in a way that cannot be hid or gainsaid. He must fill up a certain idea in the public mind. I have no other notion of greatness than this two-fold definition, great results springing from great inherent energy. The great in visible objects has relation to that which extends over space: the great in mental ones has to do with space and time. No man is truly great, who is great only in his lifetime. The test of greatness is the page of history. Nothing can be said to be great that has a distinct limit, or that borders on something evidently greater than itself. Besides, what is short-lived, and pampered into mere notoriety, is of a gross and vulgar quality in itself. A lord mayor is hardly a great man. A city orator or patriot of the day only show, by reaching the height of their wishes, the distance they are at from any true ambition. Popularity is neither fame nor greatness. A king (as such) is not a great man. He has great power, but it is not his own. He merely wields the lever of the state, which a child, an idiot, or a madman can do. It is the office, not the man, we gaze at. Anyone else in the same situation would be just as much an object of abject curiosity. We laugh at the country girl who, having seen a king, expressed her disappointment by saying: "Why, he is only a man!" Yet, knowing this, we run to see a king as if he were something more than a man.

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—To display the greatest powers, unless they are applied to great purposes, makes nothing for the character of greatness. To throw a barley-corn through the eye of a needle, to multiply nine figures by nine in the memory, argues infinite dexterity of body and capacity of mind, but nothing comes of either. There is a surprising power at work, but the effects are not proportionate, or such as take hold of the imagination. To impress the idea of power on others, they must be made in some way to feel it. It must be communicated to their understandings in the shape of an increase of knowledge, or it must subdue and overawe them by subjecting their wills. Admiration, to be solid and lasting, must be founded on proofs from which we have no means of escaping; it is neither a slight nor a voluntary gift. A mathematician who solves a profound problem, a poet who creates an image of beauty in the mind that was not there before, imparts knowledge and power to others, in which his greatness and his fame consists, and on which it reposes. Jedediah Buxton will be forgotten; but Napier's bones will live. Lawgivers, philosophers, founders of religion, conquerors, and heroes, inventors and great geniuses in arts and sciences, are great men; for they are great public benefactors, or formidable scourges to mankind. Among ourselves, Shakespeare, Newton, Bacon, Milton, Cromwell, were great men; for they showed great power by acts and thoughts, which have not yet been consigned to oblivion. They must needs be men of

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lofty stature, whose shadows lengthen out to remote posterity. A great farce-writer may be a great man; for Molière was but a great farce-writer. In my mind, the author of *Don Quixote* was a great man. So have there been many others. A great chess-player is not a great man, for he leaves the world as he found it. No act terminating in itself constitutes greatness. This will apply to all displays of power or trials of skill, which are confined to the momentary, individual effort, and construct no permanent image or trophy of themselves without them. Is not an actor then a great man, because "he dies and leaves the world no copy"? I must make an exception for Mrs. Siddons, or else give up my definition of greatness for her sake. A man at the top of his profession is not therefore a great man. He is great in his way, but that is all, unless he shows the marks of a great moving intellect, so that we trace the master-mind, and can sympathize with the springs that urge him on. The rest is but a craze or mystery. John Hunter was a great man—that anyone might see without the smallest skill in surgery. His style and manner showed the man. He would set about cutting up the carcass of a whale with the same greatness of gusto that Michael Angelo would have hewn a block of marble. Lord Nelson was a great naval commander; but for myself, I have not much opinion of a seafaring life. Sir Humphry Davy is a great chemist, but I am not sure that he is a great man. I am not a bit the wiser for any of his

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discoveries, and I never met with anyone that was. But it is in the nature of greatness to propagate an idea of itself, as wave impels wave, circle without circle. It is a contradiction in terms for a coxcomb to be a great man. A really great man has always an idea of something greater than himself. I have observed that certain sectaries and polemical writers have no higher compliment to pay their most shining lights than to say that "Such a one was a considerable man in his day". Some new elucidation of a text sets aside the authority of the old interpretation, and a "great scholar's memory outlives him half a century", at the utmost. A rich man is not a great man, except to his dependants and his steward. A lord is a great man in the idea we have of his ancestry, and probably of himself, if we know nothing of him but his title. I have heard a story of two bishops, one of whom said (speaking of St. Peter's at Rome) that when he first entered it, he was rather awe-struck, but that as he walked up it, his mind seemed to swell and dilate with it, and at last to fill the whole building—the other said that as he saw more of it, he appeared to himself to grow less and less every step he took, and in the end to dwindle into nothing. This was in some respects a striking picture of a great and little mind—for greatness sympathizes with greatness, and littleness shrinks into itself. The one might have become a Wolsey; the other was only fit to become a Mendicant Friar—or there might have been

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court reasons for making him a bishop. The French have to me a character of littleness in all about them; but they have produced three great men that belong to every country, Molière, Rabelais, and Montaigne.

To return from this digression, and conclude the Essay. A singular instance of manual dexterity was shown in the person of the late John Cavanagh, whom I have several times seen. His death was celebrated at the time in an article in the *Examiner* newspaper (Feb. 7, 1819), written apparently between jest and earnest: but as it is pat to our purpose, and falls in with my own way of considering such subjects, I shall here take leave to quote it.

"Died at his house in Burbage Street, St. Giles's, John Cavanagh, the famous hand fives-player. When a person dies, who does any one thing better than anyone else in the world, which so many others are trying to do well, it leaves a gap in society. It is not likely that anyone will now see the game of fives played in its perfection for many years to come—for Cavanagh is dead, and has not left his peer behind him. It may be said, that there are things of more importance than striking a ball against a wall—there are things indeed which make more noise and do as little good, such as making war and peace, making speeches and answering them, making verses and blotting them, making money and throwing it away. But the game of fives is what no one despises who has ever played at it. It is the finest exercise for the body, and the best relaxation

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for the mind. The Roman poet said, that 'Care mounted behind the horseman and stuck to his skirts'. But this remark would not have applied to the fives-player. He who takes to playing at fives is twice young. He feels neither the past nor the future 'in the instant'. Debts, taxes, 'domestic treason, foreign levy, nothing can touch him further'. He has no other wish, no other thought, from the moment the game begins, but of striking the ball, of placing it, of *making* it! This Cavanagh was sure to do. Whenever he touched the ball, there was an end of the chase. His eye was certain, his hand fatal, his presence of mind complete. He could do what he pleased, and he always knew exactly what to do. He saw the whole game, and played it; took instant advantage of his adversary's weakness, and recovered balls, as if by a miracle and from sudden thought, that everyone gave for lost. He had equal power and skill, quickness, and judgment. He could either outwit his antagonist by finesse, or beat him by main strength. Sometimes, when he seemed preparing to send the ball with the full swing of his arm, he would by a slight turn of his wrist drop it within an inch of the line. In general, the ball came from his hand, as if from a racket, in a straight horizontal line; so that it was in vain to attempt to overtake or stop it. As it was said of a great orator that he never was at a loss for a word, and for the properest word, so Cavanagh always could tell the degree of force necessary to be given to a

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ball, and the precise direction in which it should be sent. He did his work with the greatest ease ; never took more pains than was necessary ; and, while others were fagging themselves to death, was as cool and collected as if he had just entered the court. His style of play was as remarkable as his power of execution. He had no affectation, no trifling. He did not throw away the game to show off an attitude, or try an experiment. He was a fine, sensible, manly player, who did what he could, but that was more than anyone else could even affect to do. His blows were not undecided and ineffectual—lumbering like Mr. Wordsworth's epic poetry, nor wavering like Mr. Coleridge's lyric prose, nor short of the mark like Mr. Brougham's speeches, nor wide of it like Mr. Canning's wit, nor soul like the *Quarterly*, nor *let* balls like the *Edinburgh Review*. Cobbett and Junius together would have made a Cavanagh. He was the best *uphill* player in the world ; even when his *adversary* was fourteen, he would play *on* the same or better, and as he never flung away the game through carelessness and conceit, he never gave it up through laziness or want of heart. The only peculiarity of his play was, that he never *volleyed*, but let the balls hop ; but if they rose an inch from the ground, he never missed having them. There was not only nobody equal, but nobody second to him. It is supposed that he could give any other player half the game, or beat him with his left hand. His service was tremendous. He once played

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Woodward and Meredith together (two of the best players in England) in the Fives-court, St. Martin's Street, and made seven-and-twenty aces following by services alone—a thing unheard of. He another time played Peru, who was considered a first-rate fives-player, a match of the best out of five games, and in the three first games, which of course decided the match, Peru got only one ace. Cavanagh was an Irishman by birth, and a house-painter by profession. He had once laid aside his working-dress, and walked up, in his smartest clothes, to the Rosemary Branch to have an afternoon's pleasure. A person accosted him, and asked him if he would have a game. So they agreed to play for half a crown a game, and a bottle of cider. The first game began—it was seven, eight, ten, thirteen, fourteen, all. Cavanagh won it. The next was the same. They played on, and each game was hardly contested. 'There,' said the unconscious fives-player, 'there was a stroke that Cavanagh could not take: I never played better in my life, and yet I can't win a game. I don't know how it is.' However, they played on, Cavanagh winning every game, and the bystanders drinking the cider, and laughing all the time. In the twelfth game, when Cavanagh was only four, and the stranger thirteen, a person came in, and said: 'What! are you here, Cavanagh?' The words were no sooner pronounced than the astonished player let the ball drop from his hand, and saying: 'What! have I been breaking my heart all this time to beat Cavanagh?'

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refused to make another effort. ‘And yet, I give you my word,’ said Cavanagh, telling the story with some triumph, ‘I played all the while with my clenched fist.’—He used frequently to play matches at Copenhagen house for wagers and dinners. The wall against which they play is the same that supports the kitchen chimney, and when the wall resounded louder than usual, the cooks exclaimed: ‘Those are the Irishman’s balls’, and the joints trembled on the spit!—Goldsmith consoled himself that there were places where he too was admired: and Cavanagh was the admiration of all the fives-courts, where he ever played. Mr. Powell, when he played matches in the Court in St. Martin’s Street, used to fill his gallery at half a crown a head, with amateurs and admirers of talent in whatever department it is shown. He could not have shown himself in any ground in England, but he would have been immediately surrounded with inquisitive gazers, trying to find out in what part of his frame his unrivalled skill lay, as politicians wonder to see the balance of Europe suspended in Lord Castlereagh’s face, and admire the trophies of the British Navy lurking under Mr. Croker’s hanging brow. Now Cavanagh was as good-looking a man as the Noble Lord, and much better looking than the Right Hon. Secretary. He had a clear, open countenance, and did not look sideways or down. He was a young fellow of sense, humour, and courage. He once had a quarrel with a waterman at Hungerford Stairs, and, they say, served him out in

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great style. In a word, there are hundreds at this day who cannot mention his name without admiration, as the best fives-player that perhaps ever lived (the greatest excellence of which they have any notion)—and the noisy shout of the ring happily stood him in stead of the unheard voice of posterity!—The only person who seems to have excelled as much in another way as Cavanagh did in his, was the late John Davies, the racket-player. It was remarked of him that he did not seem to follow the ball, but the ball seemed to follow him. Give him a foot of wall, and he was sure to make the ball. The four best racket-players of that day were Jack Spines, Jem Harding, Armitage, and Church. Davies could give any one of these two hands a time, that is, half the game, and each of these, at their best, could give the best player now in London the same odds. Such are the gradations in all exertions of human skill and art. He once played four capital players together, and beat them. He was also a first-rate tennis-player, and an excellent fives-player. In the Fleet or King's Bench, he would have stood against Powell, who was reckoned the best open-ground player of his time. This last-mentioned player is at present the keeper of the Fives-court, and we might recommend to him for a motto over his door—‘Who enters here, forgets himself, his country, and his friends’. And the best of it is, that by the calculation of the odds, none of the three are worth remembering!—Cavanagh died from the bursting of a blood-vessel, which

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prevented him from playing for the last two or three years. This, he was often heard to say, he thought hard upon him. He was fast recovering, however, when he was suddenly carried off, to the regret of all who knew him. As Mr. Peel made it a qualification of the present Speaker, Mr. Manners Sutton, that he was an excellent moral character, so Jack Cavanagh was a zealous Catholic, and could not be persuaded to eat meat on a Friday, the day on which he died. We have paid this willing tribute to his memory.

"Let no rude hand deface it,
And his forlorn '*Hic Facet*'."

On Going a Journey

One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey ; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room ; but out-of-doors, nature is company enough for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.

“The fields his study, nature was his book.”

I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticising hedge-rows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places, and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room, and fewer encumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude; nor do I ask for

“a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper solitude is sweet”.

The soul of a journey is liberty; perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and

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of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others. It is because I want a little breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters, where Contemplation

“ May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair’d ”,

that I absent myself from the town for awhile, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a post-chaise or in a tilbury, to exchange good things with, and vary the same stale topics over again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours’ march to dinner —and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sun-burnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that washes him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things, like “ sunken wrack and sumless treasures ”, burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again. Instead of an awkward silence, broken by attempts at wit or common-places, mine is that undisturbed silence of the heart which alone is perfect eloquence. No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and analysis better than I do; I sometimes had rather be without them;

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circumstances that present themselves before you—these may recall a number of objects, and lead to associations too delicate and refined to be possibly communicated to others. Yet these I love to cherish, and sometimes still fondly clutch them, when I can escape from the throng to do so. To give way to our feelings before company seems extravagance or affectation; and, on the other hand, to have to unravel this mystery of our being at every turn, and to make others take an equal interest in it (otherwise the end is not answered) is a task to which few are competent. We must “give it an understanding, but no tongue”. My old friend Coleridge, however, could do both. He could go on in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale, a summer’s day, and convert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode. “He talked far above singing.” If I could so clothe my ideas in sounding and flowing words, I might perhaps wish to have someone with me to admire the swelling theme; or I could be more content, were it possible for me still to hear his echoing voice in the woods of All-Foxden. They had “that fine madness in them which our first poets had”; and if they could have been caught by some rare instrument, would have breathed such strains as the following:—

“Here be woods as green
As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet
As when smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet
Face of the curled stream, with flow’rs as many
As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;

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Here be all new delights, cool streams and wells,
Arbours o'ergrown with woodbine, caves and dells;
Choose where thou wilt, while I sit by and sing,
Or gather rushes to make many a ring
For thy long fingers; tell thee tales of love,
How the pale Phœbe, hunting in a grove,
First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes
She took eternal fire that never dies;
How she convey'd him softly in a sleep,
His temples bound with poppy, to the steep
Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night,
Gilding the mountain with her brother's light,
To kiss her sweetest."—*Faithful Shepherdess.*

Had I words and images at command like these, I would attempt to wake the thoughts that lie slumbering on golden ridges in the evening clouds: but at the sight of nature my fancy, poor as it is, droops and closes up its leaves, like flowers at sunset. I can make nothing out at the spot; I must have time to collect myself.

In general a good thing spoils out-of-door prospects: it should be reserved for Table-talk. Lamb is for this reason, I take it, the worst company in the world out-of-doors; because he is the best within. I grant there is one subject on which it is pleasant to talk on a journey; and that is, what one shall have for supper when we get to our inn at night. The open air improves this sort of conversation or friendly altercation, by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every mile of the road heightens the flavour of the viands we expect at the end of it. How fine it is to enter some old town, walled and

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turreted, just at the approach of night-fall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then, after enquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to "take one's ease at one's inn!" These eventful moments in our lives' history are too precious, too full of solid, heartfelt happiness to be frittered and dribbled away in imperfect sympathy. I would have them all to myself, and drain them to the last drop: they will do to talk of or to write about afterwards. What a delicate speculation it is, after drinking whole goblets of tea,

"The cups that cheer, but not incbriate",

and letting the fumes ascend into the brain, to sit considering what we shall have for supper—eggs and a rasher, a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excellent veal cutlet! Sancho in such a situation once fixed upon cow-heel; and his choice, though he could not help it, is not to be disparaged. Then, in the intervals of pictured scenery and Shandean contemplation, to catch the preparation and the stir in the kitchen—*Procul, O procul, este profani!* These hours are sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed the source of smiling thoughts hereafter. I would not waste them in idle talk; or if I must have the integrity of fancy broken in upon, I would rather it were by a stranger than a friend. A stranger takes his hue and character from the time and place; he is a part of the furniture and costume

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of an inn. If he is a Quaker, or from the West Riding of Yorkshire, so much the better. I do not even try to sympathize with him, and he breaks no squares. I associate nothing with my travelling companion but present objects and passing events. In his ignorance of me and my affairs, I in a manner forget myself. But a friend reminds one of other things, rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of the scene. He comes in ungraciously between us and our imaginary character. Something is dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and pursuits; or from having someone with you that knows the less sublime portions of your history, it seems that other people do. You are no longer a citizen of the world: but your "unhoused free condition is put into circumscription and confine". The *incognito* of an inn is one of its striking privileges—"lord of one's-self, uncumber'd with a name". Oh! it is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion—to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties—to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweet-breads, and to owe nothing but the score of the evening—and no longer seeking for applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than *the Gentleman in the parlour!* One may take one's choice of all characters in this romantic state of uncertainty as to one's real pretensions, and become indefinitely respectable and negatively

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right-worshipful. We baffle prejudice and disappoint conjecture; and from being so to others, begin to be objects of curiosity and wonder even to ourselves. We are no more those hackneyed common-places that we appear in the world: an inn restores us to the level of nature, and quits scores with society! I have certainly spent some enviable hours at inns—sometimes when I have been left entirely to myself, and have tried to solve some metaphysical problem, as once at Witham-common, where I found out the proof that likeness is not a case of the association of ideas—at other times, when there have been pictures in the room, as at St. Neot's (I think it was), where I first met with Gribelin's engravings of the *Cartoons*, into which I entered at once, and at a little inn on the borders of Wales, where there happened to be hanging some of Westall's drawings, which I compared triumphantly (for a theory that I had, not for the admired artist) with the figure of a girl who had ferried me over the Severn, standing up in the boat between me and the twilight—at other times I might mention, luxuriating in books, with a peculiar interest in this way, as I remember sitting up half the night to read *Paul and Virginia*, which I picked up at an inn at Bridgewater, after being drenched in the rain all day; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madame D'Arblay's *Camilla*. It was on the 10th of April, 1798, that I sat down to a volume of the *New Eloise*, at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and a cold chicken. The letter I chose was that in which

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St. Preux describes his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the Pays de Vaud, and which I had brought with me as a *bonne bouche* to crown the evening with. It was my birthday, and I had for the first time come from a place in the neighbourhood to visit this delightful spot. The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham; and on passing a certain point, you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheatre, broad, barren hills rising in majestic state on either side, with "green upland swells that echo to the bleat of flocks" below, and the river Dee babbling over its stony bed in the midst of them. The valley at this time "glittered green with sunny showers", and a budding ash-tree dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream. How proud, how glad I was to walk along the high-road that overlooks the delicious prospect, repeating the lines which I have just quoted from Mr. Coleridge's poems! But besides the prospect which opened beneath my feet, another also opened to my inward sight, a heavenly vision, on which were written, in letters large as Hope could make them, these four words, **LIBERTY, GENIUS, LOVE, VIRTUE**; which have since faded into the light of common day, or mock my idle gaze.

"The beautiful is vanished, and returns not."

Still I would return some time or other to this enchanted spot; but I would return to it alone. What other self could I find to share that influx

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of thoughts, of regret, and delight, the fragments of which I could hardly conjure up to myself, so much have they been broken and defaced! I could stand on some tall rock, and overlook the precipice of years that separates me from what I then was. I was at that time going shortly to visit the poet whom I have above named. Where is he now? Not only I myself have changed; the world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible. Yet will I turn to thee in thought, O sylvan Dee, in joy, in youth and gladness as thou then wert; and thou shalt always be to me the river of Paradise, where I will drink of the waters of life freely!

There is hardly anything that shows the short-sightedness or capriciousness of the imagination more than travelling does. With change of place we change our ideas; nay, our opinions and feelings. We can by an effort indeed transport ourselves to old and long-forgotten scenes, and then the picture of the mind revives again; but we forget those that we have just left. It seems that we can think but of one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy is but of a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they immediately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions, we only shift our point of view. The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye, we take our fill of it, and seem as if we could form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on, and think no more of it: the horizon that shuts it from our sight

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also blots it from our memory like a dream. In travelling through a wild barren country, I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it. In the country we forget the town, and in town we despise the country. "Beyond Hyde Park," says Sir Fopling Flutter, "all is a desert." All that part of the map that we do not see before us is a blank. The world, in our conceit of it, is not much bigger than a nut-shell. It is not one prospect expanded into another, county joined to county, kingdom to kingdom, lands to seas, making an image voluminous and vast;—the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance. The rest is a name written in a map, a calculation of arithmetic. For instance, what is the true signification of that immense mass of territory and population known by the name of China, to us? An inch of paste-board on a wooden globe, of no more account than a China orange! Things near us are seen of the size of life: things at a distance are diminished to the size of the understanding. We measure the universe by ourselves, and even comprehend the texture of our own being only piece-meal. In this way, however, we remember an infinity of things and places. The mind is like a mechanical instrument that plays a great variety of tunes, but it must play them in succession. One idea recalls another, but it at the same time excludes all others. In trying to renew old recollections, we cannot as it were unfold the

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whole web of our existence; we must pick out the single threads. So in coming to a place where we have formerly lived, and with which we have intimate associations, everyone must have found that the feeling grows more vivid the nearer we approach the spot, from the mere anticipation of the actual impression: we remember circumstances, feelings, persons, faces, names, that we had not thought of for years; but for the time all the rest of the world is forgotten!—To return to the question I have quitted above.

I have no objection to go to see ruins, aqueducts, pictures, in company with a friend or a party, but rather the contrary, for the former reason reversed. They are intelligible matters, and will bear talking about. The sentiment here is not tacit, but communicable and overt. Salisbury Plain is barren of criticism, but Stonehenge will bear a discussion antiquarian, picturesque, and philosophical. In setting out on a party of pleasure, the first consideration always is where we shall go to: in taking a solitary ramble, the question is what we shall meet with by the way. “The mind is its own place”; nor are we anxious to arrive at the end of our journey. I can myself do the honours indifferently well to works of art and curiosity. I once took a party to Oxford with no mean *éclat*—showed them that seat of the Muses at a distance,

“With glistering spires and pinnacles adorn’d”—
descanted on the learned air that breathes from

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the grassy quadrangles and stone walls of halls and colleges—was at home in the Bodleian; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powdered Cicerone that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to commonplace beauties in matchless pictures.—As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion. I should want at intervals to hear the sound of my own language. There is an involuntary antipathy in the mind of an Englishman to foreign manners and notions that requires the assistance of social sympathy to carry it off. As the distance from home increases, this relief, which was at first a luxury, becomes a passion and an appetite. A person would almost feel stifled to find himself in the deserts of Arabia without friends and countrymen: there must be allowed to be something in the view of Athens or old Rome that claims the utterance of speech; and I own that the Pyramids are too mighty for any single contemplation. In such situations, so opposite to all one's ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species by one's-self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support.—Yet I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set my foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears; nor did the mariners' hymn, which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbour, as the

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sun went down, send an alien sound into my soul. I only breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over "the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France", erect and satisfied; for the image of man was not cast down and chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones: I was at no loss for language, for that of all the great schools of painting was open to me. The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled: nothing remains but the Bourbons and the French people!—There is undoubtedly a sensation in travelling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else: but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. It is too remote from our habitual associations to be a common topic of discourse or reference, and, like a dream or another state of existence, does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated but a momentary hallucination. It demands an effort to exchange our actual for our ideal identity; and to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must "jump" all our present comforts and connections. Our romantic and itinerant character is not to be domesticated. Dr. Johnson remarked how little foreign travel added to the facilities of conversation in those who had been abroad. In fact, the time we have spent there is both delightful and in one sense instructive; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence, and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable individual, all the time we are out of our own country. We are

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lost to ourselves, as well as our friends. So the poet somewhat quaintly sings:

“Out of my country and myself I go”.

Those who wish to forget painful thoughts do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recall them: but we can be said only to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth. I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!—

On Coffee-house Politicians

There is a set of people who fairly come under this denomination. They spend their time and their breath in coffee-houses and other places of public resort, hearing or repeating some new thing. They sit with a paper in their hands in the morning, and with a pipe in their mouths in the evening, discussing the contents of it. The *Times*, the *Morning Chronicle*, and the *Herald* are necessary to their existence; in them "they live and move and have their being". The Evening Paper is impatiently expected, and called for at a certain critical minute: the news of the morning becomes stale and vapid by the dinner-hour. A fresher interest is required, an appetite for the latest-stirring information is excited with the return of their meals; and a glass of old port or humming ale hardly relishes as it ought without the infusion of some lively topic that had its birth with the day, and perishes before night. "Then come in the sweets of the evening":—the Queen, the coronation, the last new play, the next fight, the insurrection of the Greeks or Neapolitans, the price of stocks, or death of kings keep them on the alert till bed-time. No question comes amiss

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to them that is quite new—none is ever heard of that is at all old.

“That of an hour’s age doth hiss the speaker.”

The World before the Flood or the Intermediate State of the Soul are never once thought of—such is the quick succession of subjects, the suddenness and fugitiveness of the interest taken in them, that the *Twopenny Post-Bag* would be at present looked upon as an old-fashioned publication, and the battle of Waterloo, like the proverb, is somewhat musty. It is strange that people should take so much interest at one time in what they so soon forget:—the truth is, they feel no interest in it at any time, but it does for something to talk about. Their ideas are served up to them, like their bill of fare, for the day; and the whole creation, history, war, politics, morals, poetry, metaphysics is to them like a file of antedated newspapers, of no use, not even for reference, except the one which lies on the table!—You cannot take any of these persons at a greater disadvantage than before they are provided with their cue for the day. They ask, with a face of dreary vacuity: “Have you anything new?”—and on receiving an answer in the negative, have nothing further to say. Talk of the Westminster election, the Bridge Street Association, or Mr. Cobbett’s letter to John Cropper of Liverpool, and they are alive again. Beyond the last twenty-four hours, or the narrow round in which they move, they

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are utterly to seek, without ideas, feelings, interests, apprehensions of any sort; so that if you betray any knowledge beyond the vulgar routine of Second Editions and first-hand private intelligence, you pass with them for a dull fellow not acquainted with what is going forward in the world or with the practical value of things. I have known a person of this stamp censure John Cam Hobhouse for referring so often as he does to the affairs of the Greeks and Romans, as if the affairs of the nation were not sufficient for his hands: another asks you if a general in modern times cannot throw a bridge over a river without having studied Cæsar's Commentaries; and a third cannot see the use of the learned languages, as he has observed that the greatest proficients in them are rather taciturn than otherwise, and hesitate in their speech more than other people. A dearth of general information is almost necessary to the thorough-paced coffee-house politician; in the absence of thought, imagination, sentiment he is attracted immediately to the nearest commonplace, and floats through the chosen regions of noise and empty rumours without difficulty and without distraction. Meet "any six of these men in buckram", and they will accost you with the same question and the same answer: they have seen it somewhere in print, or had it from some city-oracle that morning; and the sooner they vent their opinions the better, for they will not keep. Like tickets of admission to the theatre for a particular

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evening, they must be used immediately, or they will be worth nothing: and the object is to find auditors for the one and customers for the other, neither of which is difficult; since people who have no ideas of their own are glad to hear what anyone else has to say, as those who have not free admissions to the play will very obligingly take up with an occasional order.—It sometimes gives one a melancholy but mixed sensation to see one of the better sort of this class of politicians, not without talents or learning, absorbed for fifty years together in the all-engrossing topic of the day: mounting on it for exercise and recreation of his faculties, like the great horse at a riding-school, and after his short, improgressive, untired career, dismounting just where he got up; flying abroad in continual consternation on the wings of all the newspapers; waving his arm like a pump handle in sign of constant change, and spouting out torrents of puddled politics from his mouth; dead to all interests but those of the state; seemingly neither older nor wiser for age; unaccountably enthusiastic, stupidly romantic, and actuated by no other motive than the mechanical operations of the spirit of newsmongering!

“What things,” exclaims Beaumont in his verses to Ben Jonson, “have we seen done at the Mermaid!”

“Then when there hath been thrown
Wit able enough to justify the town
For three days past: wit that might warrant be
For the whole city to talk foolishly!”

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I cannot say the same of the Southampton coffee-house, though it stands on classic ground, and is connected by local tradition with the great names of the Elizabethan age. What a falling off is here! Our ancestors of that period seem not only to be older by two hundred years, and proportionably wiser and wittier than we, but hardly a trace of them is left, not even the memory of what has been. How should I make my friend Mounsey stare if I were to mention the name of my still better friend, old honest Signor Friscobaldo, the father of Bellafront:—yet his name was perhaps invented, and the scenes in which he figures unrivalled might for the first time have been read aloud to thrilling ears on this very spot! Who reads Deekar now? Or if by chance anyone awakes the strings of that ancient lyre, and starts with delight as they yield wild, broken music, is he not accused of envy to the living Muse? What would a linen-draper from Holborn think if I were to ask him after the clerk of St. Andrew's, the immortal, the forgotten Webster? His name and his works are no more heard of: though *these* were written with a pen of adamant, “within the red-leaved tables of the heart”, his fame was “writ in water”. So perishable is genius, so swift is time, so fluctuating is knowledge, and so far is it from being true that men perpetually accumulate the means of improvement and refinement. On the contrary, living knowledge is the tomb of the dead, and, while light and worthless materials float on the surface, the

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solid and sterling as often sink to the bottom, and are swallowed up for ever in weeds and quicksands!—A striking instance of the short-lived nature of popular reputation occurred one evening at the Southampton, when we got into a dispute, the most learned and recondite that ever took place, on the comparative merits of Lord Byron and Gray. A country gentleman happened to drop in, and, thinking to show off in London company, launched into a lofty panegyric on the Bard of Gray as the sublimest composition in the English language. This assertion presently appeared to be an anachronism, though it was probably the opinion in vogue thirty years ago, when the gentleman was last in town. After a little floundering, one of the party volunteered to express a more contemporary sentiment by asking in a tone of mingled confidence and doubt: “But you don’t think, sir, that Gray is to be mentioned as a poet in the same day with my Lord Byron?” The disputants were now at issue: all that resulted was that Gray was set aside as a poet who would not go down among readers of the present day, and his patron treated the works of the noble bard as mere ephemeral effusions, and spoke of poets that would be admired thirty years hence, which was the farthest stretch of his critical imagination. His antagonist’s did not even reach so far. This was the most romantic digression we ever had; and the subject was not afterwards resumed.—No one here (generally speaking) has the slightest notion of anything that

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has happened, that has been said, thought, or done out of his own recollection. It would be in vain to hearken after those "wit skirmishers", those "brave sublunary things", which were the employment and delight of the Beau monts and Bens of former times: but we may happily repose on dulness, drift with the tide of nonsense, and gain an agreeable vertigo by lending an ear to endless controversies. The confusion, provided you do not mingle in the fray and try to disentangle it, is amusing and edifying enough. Every species of false wit and spurious argument may be learnt here by potent examples. Whatever observations you hear drop, have been picked up in the same place or in a kindred atmosphere. There is a kind of conversation made up entirely of scraps and hearsay, as there are a kind of books made up entirely of references to other books. This may account for the frequent contradictions which abound in the discourse of persons educated and disciplined wholly in coffee-houses. There is nothing stable or well-grounded in it: it is "nothing but vanity, chiotic vanity". They hear a remark at the Globe which they do not know what to make of; another at the Rainbow in direct opposition to it; and not having time to reconcile them, went both at the Mitre. In the course of half an hour, if they are not more than ordinarily dull, you are sure to find them on opposite sides of the question. This is the sickening part of it. People do not seem to talk for the sake of expressing their opinions,

but to maintain an opinion for the sake of talking. We meet neither with modest ignorance nor studious acquirement. Their knowledge has been taken in too much by snatches to digest properly. There is neither sincerity nor system in what they say. They hazard the first crude notion that comes to hand, and then defend it how they can; which is for the most part but ill. "Don't you think," says Mounsey, "that Mr. — is a very sensible, well-informed man?"—"Why no," I say, "he seems to me to have no ideas of his own, and only to wait to see what others will say in order to set himself against it. I should not think that is the way to get at the truth. I do not desire to be driven out of my conclusions (such as they are) merely to make way for his upstart pretensions."—"Then there is —: what of him?"—"He might very well express all he has to say in half the time, and with half the trouble. Why should he beat about the bush as he does? He appears to be getting up a little speech and practising, on a smaller scale for a Debating Society—the lowest ambition a man can have. Besides, by his manner of drawing out his words and interlarding his periods with innuendos and formal reservations, he is evidently making up his mind all the time which side he shall take. He puts his sentences together as printers set up types, letter by letter. There is certainly no principle of shorthand in his mode of elocution. He goes round for a meaning, and the sense waits for him. It is not conversation,

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but rehearsing a part. Men of education and men of the world order this matter better. They know what they have to say on a subject, and come to the point at once. Your coffee-house politician balances between what he heard last and what he shall say next; and, not seeing his way clearly, puts you off with circumstantial phrases, and tries to gain time for fear of making a false step. This gentleman has heard someone admired for precision and copiousness of language; and goes away, congratulating himself that he has not made a blunder in grammar or in rhetoric the whole evening. He is a theoretical *Quidnunc* — is tenacious in argument, though weary; carries his point thus and thus, bandies objections and answers with uneasy pleasantry, and when he has the worst of the dispute, puns very emphatically on his adversary's name, if it admits of that kind of misconstruction." George Kirkpatrick is admired by the waiter, who is a sleek hand, for his temper in managing an argument. Anyone else would perceive that the latent cause is not patience with his antagonist, but satisfaction with himself. I think this unmoved self-complacency, this cavalier, smooth, simpering indifference is more annoying than the extremest violence or irritability. The one shows that your opponent does care something about you, and may be put out of his way by your remarks; the other seems to announce that nothing you say can shake his opinion a jot, that he has considered the whole of what you have to offer beforehand, and that he is in

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all respects much wiser and more accomplished than you. Such persons talk to grown people with the same air of patronage and condescension that they do to children. "They will explain"—is a familiar expression with them, thinking you can only differ from them in consequence of misconceiving what they say. Or if you detect them in any error in point of fact (as to acknowledged deficiency in wit or argument, they would smile at the idea), they add some correction to your correction, and thus have the whip-hand of you again, being more correct than you who corrected them. If you hint some obvious oversight, they know what you are going to say, and were aware of the objection before you uttered it:—"So shall their anticipation prevent your discovery". By being in the right you gain no advantage: by being in the wrong you are entitled to the benefit of their pity or scorn! It is sometimes curious to see a select group of our little Gotham getting about a knotty point that will bear a wager, as whether Dr. Johnson's Dictionary was originally published in quarto or folio. The confident assertions, the cautious overtures, the length of time demanded to ascertain the fact, the precise terms of the forfeit, the provisos for getting out of paying it at last, lead to a long and inextricable discussion. George was however so convinced in his own mind that the *Mourning Bride* was written by Shakespeare, that he ran headlong into the snare: the bet was decided, and the punch was drank. He has skill in numbers,

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and seldom exceeds his sevenpence.—He had a brother once, no Michael Cassio, no great arithmetician: Roger was a rare fellow, of the driest humour, and the nicest tact, of infinite sleights and evasions, of a picked phrasology, and the very soul of mimicry. I fancy I have some insight into physiognomy myself, but he could often expound to me at a single glance the characters of those of my acquaintance that I had been most at fault about. The account as it was cast up and balanced between us was not always very favourable. How finely, how truly, how gaily he took off the company at the Southampton! Poor and faint are my sketches compared to his! It was like looking into a *camera obscura*—you saw faces shining and speaking—the smoke curled, the lights dazzled, the oak wainscoting took a higher polish; there was old S——, tall and gaunt, with his couplet from Pope and case at *Nisi Prius*, Mudford eyeing the ventilator and lying *perdu* for a moral, and H—— and A—— taking another friendly finishing glass!—These and many more windfalls of character he gave us in thought, word, and action. I remember his once describing three different persons together to myself and Martin Burney, viz., the manager of a country theatre, a tragic and a comic performer, till we were ready to tumble on the floor with laughing at the oddity of their humours, and at Roger's extraordinary powers of ventriloquism, bodily and mental; and Burney said (such was the vividness of the scene) that when he awoke the next morn-

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ing he wondered what three amusing characters he had been in company with the evening before. Oh! it was a rich treat to see him describe Mudford, him of the *Courier*, the *Contemplative Man*, who wrote an answer to *Cœlebs*, coming into a room, folding up his great-coat, taking out a little pocket volume, laying it down to think, rubbing the calf of his leg with grave self-complacency, and starting out of his reverie when spoken to with an inimitable vapid exclamation of "Eh!" Mudford is like a man made of fleecy hosiery: Roger was lank and lean "as is the ribbed sea-sand". Yet he seemed the very man he represented, as fat, pert, and dull as it was possible to be. I have not seen him of late:—

"For Kais is fled, and our tents are forlorn".

But I thought of him the other day when the news of the death of Buonaparte came, whom we both loved for precisely contrary reasons, he for putting down the rabble of the people and I because he had put down the rabble of kings. Perhaps this event may rouse him from his lurking-place, where he lies like reynard, with head declined, in feigned slumbers!"—

I had almost forgotten the Southampton Tavern. We for some time took C—— for a lawyer, from a certain arguteness of voice and slenderness of neck, and from his having a quibble and a laugh at himself always ready. On enquiry, however, he was found to be a patent-medicine seller, and having leisure in

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his apprenticeship, and a forwardness of parts, he had taken to study Blackstone and the Statutes at Large. On appealing to Mounsey for his opinion on this matter, he observed pithily: "I don't like so much law: the gentlemen here seem fond of law, but I have law enough at chambers". One sees a great deal of the humours and tempers of men in a place of this sort, and may almost gather their opinions from their characters. There is E——, a fellow that is always in the wrong—who puts might for right on all occasions—a Tory in grain—who has no one idea but what has been instilled into him by custom and authority—an everlasting babbler on the stronger side of the question—querulous and dictatorial, and with a peevish whine in his voice like a beaten schoolboy. He is a great advocate for the Bourbons, and for the National Debt. The former he affirms to be the choice of the French people, and the latter he insists is necessary to the salvation of these kingdoms. This last point a little inoffensive gentleman among us, of a saturnine aspect but simple conceptions, cannot comprehend. "I will tell you, sir, I will make my proposition so clear that you will be convinced of the truth of my observation in a moment. Consider, sir, the number of trades that would be thrown out of employ, if it were done away with: what would become of the porcelain manufacture without it?" Any stranger, to overhear one of these debates, would swear that the English as a nation are 'bad logicians.

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Mood and figure are unknown to them. They do not argue by the book. They arrive at conclusions through the force of prejudice, and on the principles of contradiction. Mr. E—, having thus triumphed in argument, offers a flower to the notice of the company as a specimen of his flower-garden, a curious exotic, nothing like it to be found in this kingdom, talks of his carnations, of his country house, and old English hospitality, but never invites any of his friends to come down and take their Sunday's dinner with him. He is mean and ostentatious at the same time, insolent and servile, does not know whether to treat those he converses with as if they were his porters or his customers: the prentice-boy is not yet wiped out of him, and his imagination still hovers between his mansion at —, and the workhouse. Opposed to him, and to everyone else, is K—, a radical reformer and logician, who makes clear work of the taxes and national debt, reconstructs the Government from the first principles of things, shatters the Holy Alliance at a blow, grinds out the future prospects of society with a machine, and is setting out afresh with the commencement of the French Revolution five-and-twenty years ago, as if on an untried experiment. He minds nothing but the formal agreement of his premises and his conclusions, and does not stick at obstacles in the way nor consequences in the end. If there was but one side of a question, he would always be in the right. He casts up one column of the account to

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admiration, but totally forgets and rejects the other. His ideas lie like square pieces of wood in his brain, and may be said to be piled up on a stiff architectural principle, perpendicularly, and at right angles. There is no inflection, no modification, no graceful embellishment, no Corinthian capitals. I never heard him agree to two propositions together, or to more than half a one at a time. His rigid love of truth bends to nothing but his habitual love of disputation. He puts one in mind of one of those long-headed politicians and frequenters of coffee-houses mentioned in Berkeley's *Minute Philosopher*, who would make nothing of such old-fashioned fellows as Plato and Aristotle. He has the new light strong upon him, and he knocks other people down with its solid beams. He denies that he has got certain views out of Cobbett, though he allows that there are excellent ideas occasionally to be met with in that writer. It is a pity that this enthusiastic and unqualified regard to truth should be accompanied with an equal exactness of expenditure and unrelenting eye to the main-chance. He brings a bunch of radishes with him for cheapness, and gives a band of musicians at the door a penny, observing that he likes their performance better than all the Opera-squalling. This brings the severity of his political principles into question, if not into contempt. He would abolish the National Debt from motives of personal economy, and objects to Mr. Canning's pension because it perhaps takes a farthing a year out of his own pocket. A

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great deal of radical reasoning has its source in this feeling.—He bestows no small quantity of his tediousness upon Mounsey, on whose mind all these formulas and diagrams fall like seed on stony ground: “while the manna is descending”, he shakes his ears, and in the intervals of the debate, insinuates an objection, and calls for another half-pint. I have sometimes said to him: “Anyone, to come in here without knowing you, would take you for the most disputatious man alive, for you are always engaged in an argument with somebody or other.” The truth is, that Mounsey is a good-natured, gentlemanly man, who notwithstanding, if appealed to, will not let an absurd or unjust proposition pass without expressing his dissent; and therefore he is a sort of mark for all those (and we have several of that stamp) who like to tease other people’s understandings, as wool-combers tease wool. He is certainly the flower of the flock. He is the oldest frequenter of the place, the latest sitter-up, well-informed, inobtrusive, and that sturdy old English character, a lover of truth and justice. I never knew Mounsey approve of anything unfair or illiberal. There is a candour and uprightness about his mind which can neither be wheedled nor brow-beat into unjustifiable complaisance. He looks straight forward as he sits with his glass in his hand, turning neither to the right nor the left, and I will venture to say that he has never had a sinister object in view through life. Mrs. Battle (it is recorded in her Opinions on Whist) could not make up

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her mind to use the word “*Go*”. Mounsey, from long practice, has got over this difficulty, and uses it incessantly. It is no matter what adjunct follows in the train of this despised monosyllable:—whatever liquid comes after this prefix is welcome. Mounsey, without being the most communicative, is the most conversible man I know. The social principle is inseparable from his person. If he has nothing to say, he drinks your health; and when you cannot, from the rapidity and carelessness of his utterance, catch what he says, you assent to it with equal confidence: you know his meaning is good. His favourite phrase is: “We have all of us something of the coxcomb”; and yet he has none of it himself. Before I had exchanged half a dozen sentences with Mounsey, I found that he knew several of my old acquaintance (an immediate introduction of itself, for the discussing the characters and foibles of common friends is a great sweetener and cement of friendship)—and had been intimate with most of the wits and men about town for the last twenty years. He knew Tobin, Wordsworth, Porson, Wilson, Paley, Erskine, and many others. He speaks of Paley’s pleasantry and unassuming manners, and describes Porson’s long potations and long quotations formerly at the Cider-Cellar in a very lively way. He has doubts, however, as to that sort of learning. On my saying that I had never seen the Greek Professor but once, at the Library of the London Institution, when he was dressed in an old rusty black coat, with

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cobwebs hanging to the skirts of it, and with a large patch of coarse brown paper covering the whole length of his nose, looking for all the world like a drunken carpenter, and talking to one of the Proprietors with an air of suavity approaching to condescension, Mounsey could not help expressing some little uneasiness for the credit of classical literature. "I submit, sir, whether common sense is not the principal thing? What is the advantage of genius and learning if they are of no use in the conduct of life?"—Mounsey is one who loves the hours that usher in the morn, when a select few are left in twos and threes like stars before the break of day, and when the discourse and the ale are "aye growing better and better". Wells, Mounsey, and myself were all that remained one evening. We had sat together several hours without being tired of one another's company. The conversation turned on the Beauties of Charles the Second's Court at Windsor, and from thence to Count Grammont, their gallant and gay historian. We took our favourite passages in turn—one preferring that of Killigrew's country cousin, who having been resolutely refused by Miss Warminster (one of the Maids of Honour), when he found she had been unexpectedly brought to bed, fell on his knees and thanked God that now she might take compassion on him—another insisting that the Chevalier Hamilton's assignation with Lady Chesterfield, when she kept him all night shivering in an old out-house, was better. Jacob Hall's prowess was not forgotten, nor the

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story of Miss Stuart's garters. I was getting on in my way with that delicate *éudecis*, in which Miss Churchill is first introduced at court and is besieged (as a matter of course) by the Duke of York, who was gallant as well as bigoted on system. His assiduities however soon slackened, owing (it is said) to her having a pale, thin face; till one day, as they were riding out hunting together, she fell from her horse, and was taken up almost lifeless. The whole assembled court were thrown by this event into admiration that such a body should belong to such a face (so transcendent a pattern was she of the female form), and the Duke was fixed. This I contended was striking, affecting, and grand, the sublime of amorous biography, and said I could conceive of nothing finer than the idea of a young person in her situation, who was the object of indifference or scorn from outward appearance, with the proud suppressed consciousness of a Goddess-like symmetry, locked up by "fear and niceness, the handmaids of all women", from the wonder and worship of mankind. I said so then, and I think so now: my tongue grew wanton in the praise of this passage, and I believe it bore the bell from its competitors. Wells then spoke of Lucius Apuleius and his Golden Ass, which contains the story of Cupid and Psyche, with other matter rich and rare, and went on to the romance of Heliodorus, Theagenes and Chariclea. This, as he affirmed, opens with a pastoral landscape equal to Claude, and in it the presiding deities of Love and Wine

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subjects which they have all studied in the greatest variety of entertaining or useful lights. Or in other words, a succession of good things said with good-humour, and addressed to the understandings of those who hear them, make the most desirable conversation. Ladies, lovers, beaux, wits, philosophers, the fashionable or the vulgar, are the fittest company for one another. The discourse at Randall's is the best for boxers: that at Long's for lords and loungers. I prefer Hunt's conversation almost to any other person's, because, with a familiar range of subjects, he colours with a totally new and sparkling light, reflected from his own character. Elia, the grave and witty, says things not to be surpassed in essence: but the manner is more painful and less a relief to my own thoughts. Someone conceived he could not be an excellent companion, because he was seen walking down the side of the Thames, *passibus inquis*, after dining at Richmond. The objection was not valid. I will, however, admit that the said Elia is the worst company in the world in bad company, if it be granted me that in good company he is nearly the best that can be. He is one of those of whom it may be said. *Tell me your company, and I'll tell you your manners.* He is the creature of sympathy, and makes good whatever opinion you seem to entertain of him. He cannot outgo the apprehensions of the circle; and invariably acts up or down to the point of refinement or vulgarity at which they pitch him. He appears to take

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a pleasure in exaggerating the prejudices of strangers against him; a pride in confirming the prepossessions of friends. In whatever scale of intellect he is placed, he is as lively or as stupid as the rest can be for their lives. If you think him odd and ridiculous, he becomes more and more so every minute, *à la felic*, till he is a wonder gazed at by all—set him against a good wit and a ready apprehension, and he brightens more and more—

“Or like a gate of steel
Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
Its figure and its heat”

We had a pleasant party one evening at Barry Cornwall's. A young literary bookseller who was present went away delighted with the elegance of the repast, and spoke in raptures of a servant in green livery and a patent lamp. I thought myself that the charm of the evening consisted in some talk about Beaumont and Fletcher and the old poets, in which everyone took part or interest, and in a consciousness that we could not pay our host a better compliment than in thus alluding to studies in which he excelled, and in praising authors whom he had imitated with feeling and sweetness!—I should think it may be also laid down as a rule on this subject, that to constitute good company a certain proportion of hearers and speakers is requisite. Coleridge makes good company for this reason. He immediately establishes the principle of the division

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supersedes the intellectual or social one. It is known in Manchester or Liverpool what every man in the room is worth in land or money; what are his connections and prospects in life—and this gives a character of servility or arrogance, of mercenariness or impertinence to the whole of provincial intercourse. You laugh not in proportion to a man's wit, but his wealth: you have to consider not what, but whom you contradict. You speak by the pound, and are heard by the rood. In the metropolis there is neither time nor inclination for these remote calculations. Every man depends on the quantity of sense, wit, or good manners he brings into society for the reception he meets with in it. A member of parliament soon finds his level as a commoner: the merchant and manufacturer cannot bring his goods to market here: the great landed proprietor shrinks from being the lord of acres into a pleasant companion or a dull fellow. When a visitor enters or leaves a room, it is not enquired whether he is rich or poor, whether he lives in a garret or a palace, or comes in his own or a hackney-coach, but whether he has a good expression of countenance, with an unaffected manner, and whether he is a man of understanding or a blockhead. These are the circumstances by which you make a favourable impression on the company, and by which they estimate you in the abstract. In the country, they consider whether you have a vote at the next election, or a place in your gift; and measure the

Whether Actors ought to sit in the Boxes?

I think not; and that for the following reasons, as well as I can give them:—

Actors belong to the public: their persons are not their own property. They exhibit themselves on the stage: that is enough, without displaying themselves in the boxes of the theatre. I conceive that an actor, on account of the very circumstances of his profession, ought to keep himself as much *incognito* as possible. He plays a number of parts disguised, transformed into them as much as he can “by his so potent art”, and he should not disturb this borrowed impression by unmasking before company, more than he can help. Let him go into the pit, if he pleases, to see—not into the first circle, to be seen. He is seen enough without that: he is the centre of an illusion that he is bound to support, both, as it appears to me, by a certain self-respect which should repel idle curiosity, and by a certain deference to the public, in whom he has inspired certain prejudices which he is covenanted not to break. He represents the majesty of successive kings: he takes the responsibility

chantment. Go, Mr. ——, and sit somewhere else! What a thing it is, for instance, for any part of an actor's dress to come off unexpectedly while he is playing! What a cut it is upon himself and the audience! What an effort he has to recover himself, and struggle through this exposure of the naked truth! It has been considered as one of the triumphs of Garrick's tragic power, that once when he was playing Lear, his crown of straw came off, and nobody laughed or took the least notice, so much had he identified himself with the character. Was he, after this, to pay so little respect to the feelings which he inspired, as to tear off his tattered robes, and take the old, crazed king with him to play the fool in the boxes?

“No; let him pass. Vex not his parting spirit,
Nor on the rack of this rough world
Stretch him out farther!”

Some lady is said to have fallen in love with Garrick from being present when he played the part of Romeo, on which he observed, that he would undertake to cure her of her folly if she would only come and see him in Abel Drugger. So the modern tragedian and fine gentleman, by appearing to advantage, and conspicuously, *in propria persona*, may easily cure us of our predilection for all the principal characters he shines in. “Sir! do you think Alexander looked o' this fashion in his life-time, or was perfumed so? Had Julius Caesar such a nose? or wore his frill as you do? You have slain I don't

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not carry on the illusion of our prepossessions. Ordinary transactions do not give scope to grace and dignity like romantic situations, or prepared pageants, and the *little* is apt to prevail over the *great*, if we come to count the instances.

The motto of a great actor should be *aut Caesar aut nihil*. I do not see how with his crown, or plume of feathers, he can get through those little box-doors without stooping and squeezing his artificial importance to tatters. The entrance of the stage is arched so high "that *players* may jet through, and keep their gorgeous turbans on, without good-morrow to the gods!"

The top-tragedian of the day has too large and splendid a train following him to have room for them in one of the dress boxes. When he appears there, it should be enlarged express for the occasion; for at his heels march the figures, in full costume, of Cato, and Brutus, and Cassius, and of him with the falcon eye, and Othello, and Lear, and crook-backed Richard, and Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and numbers more, and demand entrance along with him, shadows to which he alone lends bodily substance! "The graves yawn and render up their dead to push us from our stools." There is a mighty bustle at the door, a gibbering and squeaking in the lobbies. An actor's retinue is imperial, it presses upon the imagination too much, and he should therefore slide unnoticed into the pit. Authors, who are in a manner his makers and masters, sit there contented—

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why should not he? "He is used to show himself." That, then, is the very reason he should conceal his person at other times. A habit of ostentation should not be reduced to a principle. If I had seen the late Gentleman Lewis slutttering in a prominent situation in the boxes, I should have been puzzled whether to think of him as the Copper Captain, or as Bold Will, or Ranger, or young Rapid, or Lord Foppington, or fifty other whimsical characters; then I should have got Norden and Quick, and a parcel more of them in my head, till "my brain would have been like a smoke-jack": I should not have known what to make of it; but if I had seen him in the pit, I should merely have eyed him with respectful curiosity, and have told every one that *that* was Gentleman Lewis. We should have concluded from the circumstance that he was a modest, sensible man: we all knew beforehand that he could show off whenever he pleased!

There is one class of performers that I think is quite exempt from the foregoing reasoning. I mean retired actors. Come when they will and where they will, they are welcome to their old friends. They have as good a right to sit in the boxes as children at the holidays. But they do not, somehow, come often. It is but a melancholy recollection with them:—

"Then sweet,
Now sad to think on!"

Mrs. Garrick still goes often, and hears the applause of her husband over again in the shouts

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of the pit. Had Mrs. Pritchard or Mrs. Clive been living, I am afraid we should have seen little of them—it would have been too home a feeling with them. Mrs. Siddons seldom if ever goes, and yet she is almost the only thing left worth seeing there. She need not stay away on account of any theory that I can form. She is out of the pale of all theories, and annihilates all rules. Wherever she sits there is grace and grandeur, there is tragedy personified. Her seat is the undivided throne of the Tragic Muse. She had no need of the robes, the sweeping train, the ornaments of the stage; in herself she is as great as any being she ever represented in the ripeness and plenitude of her power! I should not, I confess, have had the same paramount abstracted feeling at seeing John Kemble there, whom I venerate at a distance, and should not have known whether he was playing off the great man or the great actor:—

“A little more than kin, and less than kind”.

I know it may be said, in answer to all this pretext of keeping the character of the player inviolate: “What is there more common, in fact, than for the hero of a tragedy to speak the prologue, or than for the heroine, who has been stabbed, or poisoned, to revive, and come forward laughing in the epilogue?” As to the epilogue, it is spoken to get rid of the idea of the tragedy altogether, and to ward off the fury of the pit, who may be bent on its damnation.

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are. Does not an actor himself, I would ask, feel conscious and awkward in the boxes, if he thinks that he is known? And does he not sit there in spite of this uneasy feeling, and run the gauntlet of impertinent looks and whispers, only to get a little by-admiration, as he thinks? It is hardly to be supposed that he comes to see the play, the show. He must have enough of plays and finery. But he wants to see a favourite (perhaps a rival) actor in a striking part. Then the place for him to do this is the pit. Painters, I know, always get as close up to a picture they want to copy as they can; and I should imagine actors would want to do the same, in order to look into the texture and mechanism of their art. Even theatrical critics can make nothing of a part that they see from the boxes. If you sit in the stage-box, your attention is drawn off by the company and other circumstances. If you get to a distance (so as to be out of the reach of notice) you can neither hear nor see well. For myself, I would as soon take a seat on the top of the Monument, to give an account of a first appearance, as go into the second or third tier of boxes to do it. I went, but the other day, with a box ticket, to see Miss Fanny Brunton come out in Juliet, and Mr. Macready make a first appearance in Romeo; and though I was told (by a tolerable judge) that the new Juliet was the most elegant figure on the stage, and that Mr. Macready's Romeo was quite beautiful, I vow to God I knew nothing of it. So little could I tell of the matter, that at one time I

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mistook Mr. Horrebow for Mr. Abbot. I have seen Mr. Kean play Sir Giles Overreach one night from the front of the pit, and a few nights after from the front boxes, facing the stage. It was another thing altogether. That which had been so lately nothing but flesh and blood, a living fibre, "instinct with fire" and spirit, was no better than a little santoccini figure, darting backwards and forwards on the stage, starting, screaming, and playing a number of fantastic tricks before the audience. I could account, in the latter instance, for the little approbation of the performance manifested around me, and also for the general scepticism with respect to Mr. Kean's acting, which has been said to prevail among those who cannot condescend to go into the pit, and have not interest in the orchestra—to see him act. They may then stay away altogether. His face is the running comment on his acting, which reconciles the audience to it. Without that index to his mind, you are not prepared for the vehemence and suddenness of his gestures; his pauses are long, abrupt, and unaccountable, if not filled up by the expression; it is in the working of his face that you see the writhing and coiling up of the passions before they make their serpent-spring; the lightning of his eye precedes the hoarse burst of thunder from his voice.

One may go into the boxes, indeed, and criticize acting and actors with Sterne's stopwatch, but no otherwise—"And between the nominative case and the verb (which, as your

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lordship knows, should agree together in number, person, &c.) there was a full pause of a second and two-thirds.'—'But was the eye silent—did the look say nothing?'—'I looked only at the stop-watch, my lord.'—'Excellent critic!'"—If any other actor, indeed, goes to see Mr. Kean act, with a view *to avoid imitation*, this may be the place, or rather it is the way to run into it, for you see only his extravagances and defects, which are the most easily carried away. Mr. Mathews may translate him into an *At Home* even from the slips!—Distinguished actors then ought, I conceive, to set the example of going into the pit, were it only for their own sakes. I remember a trifling circumstance, which I worked up at the time into a confirmation of this theory of mine, engrafted on old prejudice and tradition. I had got into the middle of the pit, at considerable risk of broken bones, to see Mr. Kean in one of his early parts, when I perceived two young men seated a little behind me, with a certain space left round them. They were dressed in the height of the fashion, in light drab-coloured great coats, and with their shirt-sleeves drawn down over their hands, at a time when this was not so common as it has since become. I took them for younger sons of some old family at least. One of them, that was very good-looking, I thought might be Lord Byron, and his companion might be Mr. Hobhouse. They seemed to have wandered from another sphere of this our planet, to witness a masterly performance to the utmost advantage. This stamped

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the thing. They were, undoubtedly, young men of rank and fashion; but their taste was greater than their regard for appearance. The pit was, after all, the true resort of thorough-bred critics and amateurs. When there was anything worth seeing, this was the place; and I began to feel a sort of reflected importance in the consciousness that I also was a critic. Nobody sat near them—it would have seemed like an intrusion. Not a syllable was uttered.—They were two clerks in the Victualling office!

What I would insist on, then, is this—that for Mr. Kean, or Mr. Young, or Mr. Macready, or any of those that are “cried out upon in the top of the compass” to obtrude themselves voluntarily or ostentatiously upon our notice, when they are *out of character*, is a solecism in theatricals. For them to thrust themselves forward before the scenes, is to drag us behind them against our will, than which nothing can be more fatal to a true passion for the stage, and which is a privilege that should be kept sacred for impudent curiosity. Oh! while I live, let me not be admitted (under special favour) to an actor’s dressing-room. Let me not see how Cato painted, or how Caesar combed! Let me not meet the prompt boys in the passage, nor see the half-lighted candles stuck against the bare walls, nor hear the creaking of machines, or the fiddlers laughing; nor see a Columbine practising a pirouette in sober sadness, nor Mr. Grimaldi’s face drop from mirth to sudden melancholy as he passes the side-scene, as if a shadow crossed it, nor witness the

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long-chinned generation of the pantomime sit twirling their thumbs, nor overlook the fellow who holds the candle for the moon in the scene between Lorenzo and Jessica! Spare me this insight into secrets I am not bound to know. The stage is not a mistress that we are sworn to undress. Why should we look behind the glass of fashion? Why should we prick the bubble that reflects the world, and turn it to a little soap and water? Trust a little to first appearances—leave something to fancy. I observe that the great puppets of the real stage, who themselves play a grand part, like to get into the boxes over the stage; where they see nothing from the proper point of view, but peep and pry into what is going on, like a magpie looking into a marrow-bone. This is just like them. So they look down upon human life, of which they are ignorant. They see the exits and entrances of the players, something that they suspect is meant to be kept from them (for they think they are always liable to be imposed upon): the petty pageant of an hour ends with each scene long before the catastrophe, and the tragedy of life is turned to farce under their eyes. These people laugh loud at a pantomime, and are delighted with clowns and pantaloons. They pay no attention to anything else. The stage-boxes exist in contempt of the stage and common sense. The private boxes, on the contrary, should be reserved as the receptacle for the officers of state and great diplomatic characters, who wish to avoid, rather than court, popular notice!

On the Conversation of Authors

An author is bound to write—well or ill, wisely or foolishly: it is his trade. But I do not see that he is bound to talk, any more than he is bound to dance, or ride, or fence, better than other people. Reading, study, silence, thought, are a bad introduction to loquacity. It would be sooner learned of chambermaids and tapsters. He understands the art and mystery of his own profession, which is book-making; what right has anyone to expect or require him to do more—to make a bow gracefully on entering or leaving a room, to make love charmingly, or to make a fortune at all? In all things there is a division of labour. A lord is no less amorous for writing ridiculous love-letters, nor a general less successful for wanting wit and honesty. Why then may not a poor author say nothing, and yet pass muster? Set him on the top of a stage-coach, he will make no figure; he is *mum-chance*, while the slang wit flies about as fast as the dust, with the crack of the whip and the clatter of the horses' heels: put him in a ring of boxers, he is a poor creature—

“ And of his port as meek as is a maid ”.

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Introduce him to a tea-party of milliner's girls, and they are ready to split their sides with laughing at him: over his bottle, he is dry; in the drawing-room, rude or awkward: he is too refined for the vulgar, too clownish for the fashionable:—"he is one that cannot make a good leg, one that cannot eat a mess of broth cleanly, one that cannot ride a horse without spur-galling, one that cannot salute a woman and look on her directly:" — in courts, in camps, in town and country, he is a cypher or a butt: he is good for nothing but a laughing-stock or a scarecrow. You can scarcely get a word out of him for love or money. He knows nothing. He has no notion of pleasure or business, or of what is going on in the world; he does not understand cookery (unless he is a doctor in divinity), nor surgery, nor chemistry (unless he is a *quidnunc*), nor mechanics, nor husbandry and tillage (unless he is as great an admirer of Tull's *Husbandry*, and has profited as much by it, as the philosopher of Botley)—no, nor music, painting, the Drama, nor the Fine Arts in general.

"What the deuce is it, then, my good sir, that he does understand, or know anything about?"

"BOOKS, VENUS, BOOKS!"

"What books?"

"Not receipt-books, Madonna, nor account-books, nor books of pharmacy or the veterinary art (they belong to their respective callings and handicrafts), but books of liberal taste and general knowledge."

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“What do you mean by that general knowledge which implies not a knowledge of things in general, but an ignorance (by your own account) of every one in particular: or by that liberal taste which scorns the pursuits and acquirements of the rest of the world in succession, and is confined exclusively, and by way of excellence, to what nobody takes an interest in but yourselves, and a few idlers like yourself? Is this what the critics mean by the *belles-lettres*, and the study of humanity?”

Book-knowledge, in a word, then, is knowledge *communicable by books*: and it is general and liberal for this reason, that it is intelligible and interesting on the bare suggestion. That to which anyone feels a romantic attachment, merely from finding it in a book, must be interesting in itself: that which he instantly forms a lively and entire conception of, from seeing a few marks and scratches upon paper, must be taken from common nature: that which, the first time you meet with it, seizes upon the attention as a curious speculation, must exercise the general faculties of the human mind. There are certain broader aspects of society and views of things common to every subject, and more or less cognizable to every mind; and these the scholar treats and sounds his claim to general attention upon them, without being chargeable with pedantry. The minute descriptions of fishing-tackle, of baits and flies, in *Walton's Complete Angler*, make that work a great favourite with sportsmen: the alloy of an amiable humanity, and the modest but

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touching descriptions of familiar incidents and rural objects scattered through it, have made it an equal favourite with every reader of taste and feeling. Montaigne's *Essays*, Dilworth's *Spelling Book*, and Fearn's *Treatise on Contingent Remainders*, are all equally books, but not equally adapted for all classes of readers. The two last are of no use but to schoolmasters and lawyers: but the first is a work we may recommend to anyone to read who has ever thought at all, or who would learn to think justly on any subject. Persons of different trades and professions — the mechanic, the shop-keeper, the medical practitioner, the artist, &c., may all have great knowledge and ingenuity in their several vocations, the details of which will be very edifying to themselves, and just as incomprehensible to their neighbours: but over and above this professional and technical knowledge, they must be supposed to have a stock of common sense and common feeling to furnish subjects for common conversation, or to give them any pleasure in each other's company. It is to this common stock of ideas, spread over the surface, or striking its roots into the very centre of society, that the popular writer appeals, and not in vain; for he finds readers. It is of this finer essence of wisdom and humanity, "ethereal mould, sky-tinctured", that books of the better sort are made. They contain the language of thought. It must happen that, in the course of time and the variety of human capacity, some persons will have struck out finer observations, reflections, and sentiments than others. These

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they have committed to books of memory, have bequeathed as a lasting legacy to posterity; and such persons have become standard authors. We visit at the shrine, drink in some measure of the inspiration, and cannot easily "breathe in other air less pure, accustomed to immortal fruits". Are we to be blamed for this, because the vulgar and illiterate do not always understand us? The fault is rather in them, who are "confined and cabin'd in", each in their own particular sphere and compartment of ideas, and have not the same refined medium of communication or abstracted topics of discourse. Bring a number of literary or of illiterate persons together, perfect strangers to each other, and see which party will make the best company. "Verily, we have our reward." We have made our election, and have no reason to repent it, if we were wise. But the misfortune is, we wish to have all the advantages on one side. We grudge, and cannot reconcile it to ourselves, that anyone "should go about to cozen fortune, without the stamp of learning!" We think "because we are *scholars*, there shall be no more cakes and ale!" We don't know how to account for it, that barmaids should gossip, or ladies whisper, or bullies roar, or fools laugh, or knaves thrive, without having gone through the same course of select study that we have. This vanity is preposterous, and carries its own punishment with it. Books are a world in themselves, it is true; but they are not the only world. The world itself is a volume larger than all the

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libraries in it. Learning is a sacred deposit from the experience of ages; but it has not put all future experience on the shelf, or debarred the common herd of mankind from the use of their hands, tongues, eyes, ears, or understandings. Taste is a luxury for the privileged few; but it would be hard upon those who have not the same standard of refinement in their own minds that we suppose ourselves to have, if this should prevent them from having recourse, as usual, to their old frolics, coarse jokes, and horse-play, and getting through the wear and tear of the world, with such homely sayings and shrewd helps as they may. Happy is it that the mass of mankind eat and drink, and sleep, and perform their several tasks, and do as they like without us—caring nothing for our scribblings, our carpings, and our quibbles; and moving on the same, in spite of our fine-spun distinctions, fantastic theories, and lines of demarcation, which are like the chalk-figures drawn on ball-room floors, to be danced out before morning! In the field opposite the window where I write this, there is a country-girl picking stones: in the one next it, there are several poor women weeding the blue and red flowers from the corn: farther on, are two boys, tending a flock of sheep. What do they know or care about what I am writing about them, or ever will—or what would they be the better for it, if they did? Or why need we despise

“The wretched slave,
Who like a lackey, from the rise to the set,

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Sweats in the eye of Phœbus, and all night
Sleeps in Elysium; next day, after dawn,
Doth rise, and help Hyperion to his horse;
And follows so the ever-running year
With profitable labour to his grave"?

Is not this life as sweet as writing Ephemerides? But we put that which flutters the brain idly for a moment, and then is heard no more, in competition with nature, which exists everywhere, and lasts always. We not only underrate the force of nature, and make too much of art, but we also overrate our own accomplishments and advantages derived from art. In the presence of clownish ignorance, or of persons without any great pretensions, real or affected, we are very much inclined to take upon ourselves, as the virtual representatives of science, art, and literature. We have a strong itch to show off and do the honours of civilization for all the great men whose works we have ever read, and whose names our auditors have never heard of, as noblemen's lacqueys, in the absence of their masters, give themselves airs of superiority over everyone else. But though we have read Congreve, a stage-coachman may be an overmatch for us in wit; though we are deep-versed in the excellence of Shakespeare's colloquial style, a village beldam may outcold us; though we have read Machiavel in the original Italian, we may be easily outwitted by a clown; and though we have cried our eyes out over the *New Eloise*, a poor shepherd-lad, who hardly knows how to spell his own name,

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other. The proof of which is, that, when you are used to it, you cannot put up with any other. That of mixed company becomes utterly intolerable—you cannot sit out a common tea and card party, at least, if they pretend to talk at all. You are obliged in despair to cut all your old acquaintance who are not *au fait* on the prevailing and most smartly-contested topics, who are not imbued with the high gusto of criticism and *virtù*. You cannot bear to hear a friend, whom you have not seen for many years, tell at how much a yard he sells his laces and tapes, when he means to move into his next house, when he heard last from his relations in the country, whether trade is alive or dead, or whether Mr. Such-a-one gets a look old. This sort of neighbourly gossip will not go down after the high-raised tone of literary conversation. The last may be very absurd, very unsatisfactory, and full of turbulence and heart-burnings; but it has a zest in which more ordinary topics of news or family affairs do not supply. Neither will the conversation of what we understand by gentlemen and men of fashion, do after that of men of letters. It is flat, insipid, stale, and unprofitable, in the comparison. They talk about such the same things,—pictures, poetry, politics, plays; but they do it worse, and at a sort of vapid secondhand. They, in fact, talk out of newspapers and magazines what *we write here*. They do not feel the same interest in the subjects they affect to handle with an air of fashionable condescension; nor have they

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the same knowledge of them, if they were ever so much in earnest in displaying it. If it were not for the wine and the dessert, no author in his senses would accept an invitation to a well-dressed dinner-party, except out of pure good-nature and unwillingness to disoblige by his refusal. Persons in high life talk almost entirely by rote. There are certain established modes of address, and certain answers to them expected as a matter of course, as a point of etiquette. The studied forms of politeness do not give the greatest possible scope to an exuberance of wit or fancy. The fear of giving offence destroys sincerity; and without sincerity there can be no true enjoyment of society, nor unfettered exertion of intellectual activity. Those who have been accustomed to live with the great are hardly considered as conversible persons in literary society. They are not to be talked with, any more than puppets or echoes. They have no opinions but what will please; and you naturally turn away, as a waste of time and words, from attending to a person who just before assented to what you said, and whom you find, the moment after, from something that unexpectedly or perhaps by design drops from him, to be of a totally different way of thinking. This *bush-fighting* is not regarded as fair play among scientific men. As fashionable conversation is a sacrifice to politeness, so the conversation of low life is nothing but rudeness. They contradict you without giving a reason; or if they do, it is a very bad one—swear, talk loud, repeat the same thing fifty

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times over, get to calling names, and from words proceed to blows. You cannot make companions of servants, or persons in an inferior station in life. You may talk to them on matters of business, and what they have to do for you (as lords talk to bruisers on subjects of *fancy*, or country-squires to their grooms on horse-racing); but out of that narrow sphere, to any general topic, you cannot lead them; the conversation soon flags, and you go back to the old question, or are obliged to break up the sitting for want of ideas in common. The conversation of authors is better than that of most professions. It is better than that of lawyers, who talk nothing but *double entendre*—than that of physicians, who talk of the approaching deaths of the College, or the marriage of some new practitioner with some rich widow—than that of divines, who talk of the last place they dined at—than that of University men, who make stale puns, repeat the refuse of the London newspapers, and affect an ignorance of Greek and mathematics; it is better than that of players, who talk of nothing but the green-room, and rehearse the scholar, the wit, or the fine gentleman, like a part on the stage—or than that of ladies, who, whatever you talk of, think of nothing, and expect you to think of nothing, but themselves. It is not easy to keep up a conversation with women in company. It is thought a piece of rudeness to differ from them: it is not quite fair to ask them a reason for what they say. You are afraid of pressing too hard upon them: but

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where you cannot differ openly and unreservedly, you cannot heartily agree. It is not so in France. There the women talk of things in general, and reason better than the men in this country. They are mistresses of the intellectual foils. They are adepts in all the topics. They know what is to be said for and against all sorts of questions, and are lively and full of mischief into the bargain. They are very subtle. They put you to your trumps immediately. Your logic is more in requisition even than your gallantry. You must argue as well as bow yourself into the good graces of these modern Amazons. What a situation for an Englishman to be placed in!

The fault of literary conversation in general is its too great tenaciousness. It fastens upon a subject, and will not let it go. It resembles a battle rather than a skirmish, and makes a toil of a pleasure. Perhaps it does this from necessity—from a consciousness of wanting the more familiar graces, the power to sport and trifle, to touch lightly and adorn agreeably, every view or turn of a question *en passant*, as it arises. Those who have a reputation to lose are too ambitious of shining, to please. "To excel in conversation," said an ingenious man, "one must not be always striving to say good things: to say one good thing, one must say many bad, and more indifferent ones." This desire to shine without the means at hand, often makes men silent:—

"The fear of being silent strikes us dumb."

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A writer who has been accustomed to take a connected view of a difficult question, and to work it out gradually in all its bearings, may be very deficient in that quickness and ease which men of the world, who are in the habit of hearing a variety of opinions, who pick up an observation on one subject, and another on another, and who care about none any farther than the passing away of an idle hour, usually acquire. An author has studied a particular point—he has read, he has enquired, he has thought a great deal upon it: he is not contented to take it up casually in common with others, to throw out a hint, to propose an objection; he will either remain silent, uneasy, and dissatisfied, or he will begin at the beginning and go through with it to the end. He is for taking the whole responsibility upon himself. He would be thought to understand the subject better than others, or, indeed, would show that nobody else knows anything about it. There are always three or four points on which the literary novice at his first outset in life fancies he can enlighten every company, and bear down all opposition: but he is cured of this Quixotie and pugnacious spirit, as he goes more into the world, where he finds that there are other opinions and other pretensions to be adjusted besides his own. When this asperity wears off, and a certain scholastic pre-*coe*ity is mellowed down, the conversation of men of letters becomes both interesting and instructive. Men of the world have no fixed principles, no ground-work of thought: mere

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scholars have too much an object, a theory always in view, to which they wrest everything, and, not unfrequently, common sense itself. By mixing with society, they rub off their hardness of manner, and impracticable, offensive singularity, while they retain a greater depth and coherence of understanding. There is more to be learnt from them than from their books. This was a remark of Rousseau's, and it is a very true one. In the confidence and unreserve of private intercourse they are more at liberty to say what they think, to put the subject in different and opposite points of view, to illustrate it more briefly and pithily by familiar expressions, by an appeal to individual character and personal knowledge—to bring in the limitation, to obviate misconception, to state difficulties on their own side of the argument, and answer them as well as they can. This would hardly agree with the prudery, and somewhat ostentatious claims, of authorship. Dr. Johnson's conversation in Boswell's *Life* is much better than his published works: and the fragments of the opinions of celebrated men, preserved in their letters or in anecdotes of them, are justly sought after as invaluable for the same reason. For instance, what a fund of sense there is in Grimm's *Memoirs*! We thus get at the essence of what is contained in their more laboured productions, without the affectation or formality.—Argument, again, is the death of conversation, if carried on in a spirit of hostility: but discussion is a pleasant and profitable thing, where

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you advance and defend your opinions as far as you can, and admit the truth of what is objected against them with equal impartiality ; in short, where you do not pretend to set up for an oracle, but freely declare what you really know about any question, or suggest what has struck you as throwing a new light upon it, and let it pass for what it is worth. This tone of conversation was well described by Dr. Johnson, when he said of some party at which he had been present the night before—“ We had good talk, sir ! ” As a general rule, there is no conversation worth anything but between friends, or those who agree in the same leading views of a subject. Nothing was ever learnt by either side in a dispute. You contradict one another, will not allow a grain of sense in what your adversary advances, are blind to whatever makes against yourself—dare not look the question fairly in the face, so that you cannot avail yourself even of your real advantages—insist most on what you feel to be the weakest points of your argument, and get more and more absurd, dogmatical, and violent every moment. Disputes for victory generally end to the dissatisfaction of all parties ; and the one recorded in *Gil Blas* breaks up just as it ought. I once knew a very ingenious man, than whom, to take him in the way of common chit-chat, or fireside gossip, no one could be more entertaining or rational. He would make an apt classical quotation, propose an explanation of a curious passage in Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*, detect a metaphysical error in Locke,

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would infer the volatility of the French character from the chapter in Sterne where the Count mistakes the feigned name of Yorick for a proof of his being the identical imaginary character in *Hamlet* (*Et cetera étes Yorick?*)—thus confounding words with things twice over—but let a difference of opinion be once hitched in, and it was all over with him. His only object from that time was to shut out common sense, and to be proof against conviction. He would argue the most ridiculous point (such as that there were two original languages) for hours together, nay, through the horologe. You would not suppose it was the same person. He was like an obstinate runaway horse, that takes the bit in his mouth, and becomes mischievous and unmanageable. He had made up his mind to one thing, not to admit a single particle of what anyone else said for or against him. It was all the difference between a man drunk or sober, sane or mad.

This litigious humour is bad enough: but there is one character still worse—that of a person who goes into company, not to contradict, but to *talk* at you. This is the greatest nuisance in civilized society. Such a person does not come armed to defend himself at all points, but to unsettle, if he can, and throw a slur on all your favourite opinions. If he has a notion that anyone in the room is fond of poetry, he immediately volunteers a contemptuous tirade against the idle jingle of verse. If he suspects you have a delight in pictures, he endeavours, not by fair argument, but by a

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side-wind, to put you out of conceit with so frivolous an art. If you have a taste for music, he does not think much good is to be done by this tickling of the ears. If you speak in praise of a comedy, he does not see the use of wit. if you say you have been to a tragedy, he shakes his head at this mockery of human misery, and thinks it ought to be prohibited. He tries to find out beforehand whatever it is that you take a particular pride or pleasure in, that he may annoy your self-love in the tenderest point (as if he were probing a wound), and make you dissatisfied with yourself and your pursuits for several days afterwards. A person might as well make a practice of throwing out scandalous aspersions against your dearest friends or nearest relations, by way of ingratiating himself into your favour. Such ill-timed impertinence is "villainous, and shows a pitiful ambition in the fool that uses it".

The soul of conversation is sympathy. Authors should converse chiefly with authors, and their talk should be of books. "When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war." There is nothing so pedantic as pretending not to be pedantic. No man can get above his pursuit in life: it is getting above himself, which is impossible. There is a Free-masonry in all things. You can only speak to be understood; but this you cannot be, except by those who are in the secret. Hence an argument has been drawn to supersede the necessity of conversation altogether; for it has been said, that there is no use in talking to

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people of sense, who know all that you can tell them, nor to fools, who will not be instructed. There is, however, the smallest encouragement to proceed, when you are conscious that the more you really enter into a subject, the farther you will be from the comprehension of your hearers—and that the more proofs you give of any position, the more odd and out-of-the-way they will think your notions. Coleridge is the only person who can talk to all sorts of people, on all sorts of subjects, without caring a farthing for their understanding one word he says—and he talks only for admiration and to be listened to, and accordingly the least interruption puts him out. I firmly believe he would make just the same impression on half his audiences if he purposely repeated absolute nonsense with the same voice and manner and inexhaustible flow of undulating speech! In general, wit shines only by reflection. You must take your cue from your company—must rise as they rise, and sink as they fall. You must see that your good things, your knowing allusions, are not flung away, like the pearls in the adage. What a cheek it is to be asked a foolish question; to find that the first principles are not understood! You are thrown on your back immediately, the conversation is stopped like a country-dance by those who do not know the figure. But when a set of adepts, of *illuminati*, get about a question, it is worth while to hear them talk. They may snarl and quarrel over it, like dogs; but they pick it bare to the bone, they masticate it thoroughly.

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This was the case formerly at Lamb's, where we used to have many lively skirmishes at their Thursday-evening parties. I doubt whether the Small-coal man's musical parties could exceed them. O for the pen of John Bunle to consecrate a *petit souvenir* to their memory! There was Lamb himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men. He always made the best pun and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half-sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears; and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a keen, laughing, hair-brained vein of home-felt truth! What choice venom! How often did we cut into the haunch of letters, while we discussed the haunch of mutton on the table! How we skimmed the cream of criticism! How we got into the heart of controversy! How we picked out the marrow of authors! "And, in our flowing cups, many a good name and true was freshly remembered." Recollect (most sage and critical reader) that in all this I was but a guest! Need I go over the names? They were but the old everlasting set—Milton and Shakespeare, Pope and Dryden, Steele and Addison, Swift and Gay, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Richardson, Hogarth's prints, Claude's landscapes, the Cartoons at Hampton Court, and all those things that, having once been, must ever be. The Scotch Novels had not then

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been heard of: so we said nothing about them. In general, we were hard upon the moderns. The author of the *Rambler* was only tolerated in Boswell's Life of him: and it was as much as anyone could do to edge in a word for Junius. Lamb could not bear *Gil Blas*. This was a fault. I remember the greatest triumph I ever had was in persuading him, after some years' difficulty, that Fielding was better than Smollett. On one occasion, he was for making out a list of persons famous in history that one would wish to see again—at the head of whom were Pontius Pilate, Sir Thomas Browne, and Dr. Faustus—but we black-balled most of his list! But with what a gusto would he describe his favourite authors, Donne, or Sir Philip Sidney, and call their most crabbed passages *delicious!* He tried them on his palate as epicures taste olives, and his observations had a smack in them, like a roughness on the tongue. With what discrimination he hinted a defect in what he admired most—as in saying that the display of the sumptuous banquet in *Paradise Regained* was not in true keeping, as the simplest fare was all that was necessary to tempt the extremity of hunger—and stating that Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* were too much like married people. He has furnished many a text for Coleridge to preach upon. There was no fuss or cant about him: nor were his sweets or his sours ever diluted with one particle of affectation. I cannot say that the party at Lamb's were all of one description. There were honorary-members, lay-brothers: Wit

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and good fellowship was the motto inscribed over the door. When a stranger came in, it was not asked: "Has he written anything?"—we were above that pedantry; but we waited to see what he could do. If he could take a hand at piquet, he was welcome to sit down. If a person liked anything, if he took snuff heartily, it was sufficient. He would understand, by analogy, the pungency of other things, besides Irish blackguard or Scotch rappee. A character was good anywhere, in a room or on paper. But we abhorred insipidity, affectation, and fine gentlemen. There was one of our party who never failed to mark "two for his Nob" at cribbage, and he was thought no mean person. This was Ned Phillips, and a better fellow in his way breathes not. There was Rickman, who asserted some incredible matter-of-fact as a likely paradox, and settled all controversies by an *ipse dixit*, a fiat of his will, hammering out many a hard theory on the anvil of his brain—the Baron Munchausen of politics and practical philosophy; there was Captain Burney, who had you at an advantage by never understanding you; there was Jem White, the author of *Falstaff's Letters*, who the other day left this dull world to go in search of more kindred spirits, "turning like the latter end of a lover's lute"; there was Ayrton, who sometimes dropped in, the Will Honeycomb of our set—and Mrs. Reynolds, who, being of a quiet turn, loved to hear a noisy debate. An utterly uninformed person might have supposed this a scene of vulgar confusion and uproar. While

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the most critical question was pending, while the most difficult problem in philosophy was solving, Phillips cried out: "That's game", and Martin Burney muttered a quotation over the last remains of a veal-pie at a side-table. Once, and once only, the literary interest overcame the general. For Coleridge was riding the high German horse, and demonstrating the Categories of the Transcendental philosophy to the author of the *Road to Ruin*; who insisted on his knowledge of German, and German metaphysics, having read the *Critique of Pure Reason* in the original. "My dear Mr. Holcroft," said Coleridge, in a tone of infinitely provoking conciliation, "you really put me in mind of a sweet pretty German girl, about fifteen, that I met with in the Hartz forest in Germany, and who one day, as I was reading the *Limits of the Knowable and the Unknowable*, the profoundest of all his works, with great attention, came behind my chair, and, leaning over, said: 'What, you read Kant? Why, I, that am a German born, don't understand him!'" This was too much to bear, and Holcroft, starting up, called out in no measured tone: "Mr. Coleridge, you are the most eloquent man I ever met with, and the most troublesome with your eloquence!" Phillips held the cribbage-peg, that was to mark him game, suspended in his hand; and the whist-table was silent for a moment. I saw Holcroft downstairs, and, on coming to the landing-place in Mitre court, he stopped me to observe, that "he thought Mr. Coleridge a very clever man, with a great command of

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language, but that he feared he did not always affix very precise ideas to the words he used". After he was gone, we had our laugh out, and went on with the argument on the nature of Reason, the Imagination, and the Will. I wish I could find a publisher for it: it would make a supplement to the *Biographia Literaria* in a volume and half octavo.

Those days are over! An event, the name of which I wish never to mention, broke up our party like a bomb-shell thrown into the room: and now we seldom meet—

“Like angels' visits, short and far between”.

There is no longer the same set of persons, nor of associations. Lamb does not live where he did. By shifting his abode his notions seem less fixed. He does not wear his old snuff-coloured coat and breeches. It looks like an alteration in his style. An author and a wit should have a separate costume, a particular cloth: he should present something positive and singular to the mind, like Mr. Douce of the Museum. Our faith in the religion of letters will not bear to be taken to pieces, and put together again by caprice or accident. Leigh Hunt goes there sometimes. He has a fine vinous spirit about him, and tropical blood in his veins; but he is better at his own table. He has a great flow of pleasantry and delightful animal spirits; but his hits do not tell like Lamb's; you cannot repeat them the next day. He requires not only to be appre-

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ciated but to have a select circle of admirers and devotees, to feel himself quite at home. He sits at the head of a party with great gaiety and grace; has an elegant manner and turn of features; is never at a loss—*aliquando sufflamenandus erat*—has continual sportive sallies of wit or fancy; tells a story capitally; mimics an actor, or an acquaintance, to admiration; laughs with great glee and good-humour at his own or other people's jokes; understands the point of an equivoque, or an observation, immediately; has a taste and knowledge of books, of music, of medals; manages an argument adroitly; is genteel and gallant, and has a set of bye-phrases and quaint allusions always at hand to produce a laugh:—if he has a fault it is that he does not listen so well as he speaks, is impatient of interruption, and is fond of being looked up to without considering by whom. I believe, however, he has pretty well seen the folly of this. Neither is his ready display of personal accomplishment and variety of resources an advantage to his writings. They sometimes present a desultory and slip-shod appearance owing to this very circumstance. The same things that tell, perhaps, best, to a private circle round the fireside, are not always intelligible to the public, nor does he take pains to make them so. He is too confident and secure in his audience. That which may be entertaining enough with the assistance of a certain liveliness of manner may read very flat on paper, because it is abstracted from all the circumstances that had

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set it off to advantage. A writer should recollect that he has only to trust to the immediate impression of words, like a musician who sings without the accompaniment of an instrument. There is nothing to help out—or slumber over—the defects of the voice in the one case, nor of the style in the other. The reader may, if he pleases, get a very good idea of Leigh Hunt's conversation from a very agreeable paper he has lately published, called the *Indicator*, than which nothing can be more happily conceived or executed.

The art of conversation is the art of hearing as well as of being heard. Authors in general are not good listeners. Some of the best talkers are, on this account, the worst company; and some who are very indifferent, but very great talkers, are as bad. It is sometimes wonderful to see how a person, who has been entertaining or tiring a company by the hour together, drops his countenance as if he had been shot, or had been seized with a sudden lock-jaw, the moment anyone interposes a single observation. The best converser I know is, however, the best listener. I mean Mr. Northcote, the painter. Painters by their profession are not bound to shine in conversation, and they shine the more. He lends his ear to an observation as if you had brought him a piece of news, and enters into it with as much avidity and earnestness as if it interested himself personally. If he repeats an old remark or story, it is with the same freshness and point as for the first time. It always arises out of the occasion,

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and has the stamp of originality. There is no parroting of himself. His look is a continual, ever-varying history-piece of what passes in his mind. His face is as a book. There need no marks of interjection or interrogation to what he says. His manner is quite picturesque. There is an excess of character and *naïveté* that never tires. His thoughts bubble up and sparkle like beads on old wine. The fund of anecdote, the collection of curious particulars, is enough to set up any common retailer of jests that dines out every day; but these are not strung together like a row of galley-slaves, but are always introduced to illustrate some argument or bring out some fine distinction of character. The mixture of spleen adds to the sharpness of the point, like poisoned arrows. Mr. Northcote enlarges with enthusiasm on the old painters, and tells good things of the new. The only thing he ever vexed me in was his liking the *Catalogue Raisonné*. I had almost as soon hear him talk of Titian's pictures (which he does with tears in his eyes, and looking just like them) as see the originals, and I had rather hear him talk of Sir Joshua's than see them. He is the last of that school who knew Goldsmith and Johnson. How finely he describes Pope! His elegance of mind, his figure, his character were not unlike his own. He does not resemble a modern Englishman, but puts one in mind of a Roman Cardinal or Spanish Inquisitor. I never ate or drank with Mr. Northcote; but I have lived on his conversation with undiminished

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relish ever since I can remember,—and when I leave it I come out into the street with feelings lighter and more ethereal than I have at any other time.—One of his *tête-à-têtes* would at any time make an Essay; but he cannot write himself, because he loses himself in the connecting passages, is fearful of the effect, and wants the habit of bringing his ideas into one focus or point of view. A *lens* is necessary to collect the diverging rays, the refracted and broken angular lights of conversation, on paper. Contradiction is half the battle in talking—the being startled by what others say, and having to answer on the spot. You have to defend yourself, paragraph by paragraph, parenthesis within parenthesis. Perhaps it might be supposed that a person who excels in conversation and cannot write would succeed better in dialogue. But the stimulus, the immediate irritation would be wanting; and the work would read flatter than ever, from not having the very thing it pretended to have.

Lively sallies and connected discourse are very different things. There are many persons of that impatient and restless turn of mind that they cannot wait a moment for a conclusion, or follow up the thread of any argument. In the hurry of conversation their ideas are somehow huddled into sense; but, in the intervals of thought, leave a great gap between. Montesquieu said he often lost an idea before he could find words for it: yet he dictated, by way of saving time, to an amanuensis. This

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last is, in my opinion, a vile method, and a solecism in authorship. Horne Tooke, among other paradoxes, used to maintain that no one could write a good style who was not in the habit of talking and hearing the sound of his own voice. He might as well have said that no one could relish a good style without reading it aloud, as we find common people do to assist their apprehension. But there is a method of trying periods on the ear, or weighing them with the scales of the breath, without any articulate sound. Authors, as they write, may be said to "hear a sound so fine, there's nothing lives 'twixt it and silence". Even musicians generally compose in their heads. I agree that no style is good that is not fit to be spoken or read aloud with effect. This holds true not only of emphasis and cadence, but also with regard to natural idiom and colloquial freedom. Sterne's was in this respect the best style that ever was written. You fancy that you hear the people talking. For a contrary reason, no college man writes a good style or understands it when written. Fine writing is with him all verbiage and monotony—a translation into classical centos or hexameter lines.

That which I have just mentioned is among many instances I could give of ingenuous absurdities advanced by Mr. Tooke in the heat and pride of controversy. A person who knew him well, and greatly admired his talents, said of him that he never (to his recollection) heard him defend an opinion which he thought

right, or in which he believed him to be himself sincere. He indeed prodded his antagonists into the toils by the very extravagance of his assertions and the teasing sophistry by which he rendered them plausible. His temper was prompter to his skill. He had the manners of a man of the world, with great scholastic resources. He flung everyone else off his guard, and was himself immovable. I never knew anyone who did not admit his superiority in this kind of warfare. He put a full stop to one of Coleridge's long-winded apologies for his youth and inexperience by saying abruptly. "Speak up, young man!" and, at another time, silenced a learned professor (Nicholson), by desiring an explanation of a word which the other frequently used, and which, he said, he had been many years trying to get at the meaning of,—the copulative *Is*! He was the best intellectual fencer of his day. He made strange havoc of Fuseli's fantastic hieroglyphics, violent humours, and oddities of dialect. Curran, who was sometimes of the same party, was lively and animated in convivial conversation, but dull in argument; nay, averse to anything like reasoning or serious observation, and had the worst taste I ever knew. His favourite critical topics were to abuse Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Indeed, he confessed a want of sufficient acquaintance with books when he found himself in literary society in London. He and Sheridan once dined at John Kemble's with Mrs. Inchbald and Mary Wollstonecraft, when the